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EXECUTIVE SESSION

PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: JEFFERSON B. SESSIONS

Thursday, November 30, 2017

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in Room HVC-304, the Capitol, commencing at 9:04 a.m.

Present: Representatives Conaway, King, Rooney, Ros-Lehtinen, Wenstrup, Stewart, Gowdy, Stefanik, Schiff, Himes, Sewell, Speier, Quigley,

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Swalwell, Castro, and Heck.

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Appearances:

For the PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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STEPHEN E. BOYD

[REDACTED] Good morning. This is a transcribed interview of Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Thank you for speaking to us today. For the record, I am [REDACTED] for the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence for the majority. Also present are a number of other members and staff, who will identify themselves during the course of these proceedings.

But before we get started, I wanted to state a few things for the record. The questioning will be conducted by members and staff. During the course of this interview, members and staff may ask questions during their allotted time period. Some questions may seem basic, but that is because we need to clearly establish facts and understand the situation. Please do not assume we know any facts you have previously disclosed as part of any other investigation or review.

This interview will be conducted at the unclassified level.

During the course of this interview, we will take any breaks that you desire. We ask that you give complete and fulsome replies to questions, based on your best recollection. If a question is unclear or you are uncertain in your response, please let us know. If you do not know the answer to a question or cannot remember, simply say so.

You are entitled to have counsel present for this interview, and I see that you have brought them. At this time, if counsel could please identify themselves for the record.

MR. COOPER: My name is Charles J. Cooper with Cooper & Kirk.

[REDACTED] Thank you. The interview will be transcribed. There is a reporter making a record of these proceedings so we can easily consult a written compilation of your answers.

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Because the reporter cannot record gestures, we ask that you answer verbally. If you forget to do this, you might be reminded to do so. You may also be asked to spell certain terms or unusual phrases. Consistent with the committee's rules of procedure, you and your counsel, upon request, will have a reasonable opportunity to inspect the transcript of this interview in order to determine whether your answers were correctly transcribed. The transcript will remain in the committee's custody. The committee also reserves the right to request your return for additional questions, should the need arise.

The process for the interview is as follows: The minority will be given 45 minutes to ask questions. Then the majority will be given 45 minutes to ask questions. Immediately thereafter, we'll take a 5-minute break if you desire, after which time, we will continue in the following manner: The minority will be given 15 minutes to ask questions, and the majority will be given 15 minutes to ask questions. These 15-minute rounds will continue until questioning has been completed. The time will be kept for each round by myself and warnings will be given for the 5- and 1-minute marks, respectively.

To ensure confidentiality, we ask that you do not discuss the interview with anyone other than your attorney. You are reminded that it is unlawful to deliberately provide false information to Members of Congress or staff. And lastly, the record will reflect that you are voluntarily participating in this interview, which will be under oath.

Mr. Attorney General, if you could raise your right hand to be sworn.

Do you swear or affirm the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I do.

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██████████ Thank you, sir, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CONAWAY: Mr. Attorney General, thank you for coming this morning. I'm Mike Conaway from Texas. I'm the lead on the investigation, along with my colleague, Adam Schiff, and Trey Gowdy and Tom Rooney on our side. So thank you for coming this morning.

With that, Mr. Schiff, any comments?

MR. SCHIFF: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Attorney General, welcome to the committee. I look forward to your testimony today and appreciate your coming in.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Thank you.

MR. CONAWAY: With that, we will start. Do you have a statement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I just would say that I've testified now quite a number of hours. I asked to have my previous testimony before the Intel Committee open, and it is my goal to be open and cooperative in your important work.

MR. CONAWAY: All right. Thank you.

With that, Mr. Schiff, your side has 45 minutes.

MR. SCHIFF: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Attorney General, I want to start with March 17th of last year. During the 2016 campaign, you led the then-Candidate Trump's foreign policy team as chair of his National Security Advisory Committee. Is that correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. SCHIFF: On March 17, Steve Miller, in an interview, said that on the Kelly file, quote, "Jeff Sessions has been meeting for hours now, putting together a team of foreign policy advisers, military experts, and intelligence experts."

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He went on to explain that he had spoken with you and your military advisers about, quote, "some robust foreign policy ideas" that same day shortly before arriving for the interview.

Do you recall the discussion of that day on March 17th with Mr. Miller and the military advisers?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That there was a meeting on March 17th?

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. The meeting that Mr. Miller was referring to, in which he said that you had been meeting for hours putting together a team of foreign policy advisers, military experts, and intelligence experts.

Why don't I ask you this way: Had you been meeting for hours that day with foreign policy advisers, military experts, and intelligence experts?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I had talked with quite a number of people that I thought might be interested in being a part of the Trump advisory team. It was not a large group. A number of hours was spent on that. Most of the foreign policy experts had already chosen sides. On the Republican side, Jeb Bush had the vast majority of them. So we had a smaller group, but I did talk to them.

I don't recall at this point a specific meeting that may have occurred that -- suggested by Mr. Miller's statement. We may have had some smaller meetings, but I don't recall any big meeting at this time.

MR. SCHIFF: His comment seemed to suggest that there was a long discussion on March 17th with either people who were candidates to be military advisers to the campaign or actual advisers to the campaign. Do you know which they were?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. I don't know exactly what he's referring to there, frankly. We were talking to a number of people. I had been asked to put together a team that would be an advisory team. I think it was important, that Mr. Trump and his advisers felt that it was important to have people of some experience to be supportive of him, and we did what we could.

MR. SCHIFF: For context, this would have taken place four days before the President, then-Candidate Trump, announced his foreign policy team.

Do you recall who you met with prior to that announcement? Were you interviewing potential candidates to be on that foreign policy team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I had talked to a number of people, mostly by phone. And it was not so much of an interview; it was more of a, Would you join us, for people that had some experience in the area that could be helpful to the campaign or to the nominee, or potential nominee, the candidate.

MR. SCHIFF: So you don't recall having a --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall a specific meeting, Mr. Schiff. I could go back and think about that. I would be glad to supplement the record. But I don't recall that, although it could have happened.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you know whether, prior to the announcement of the foreign policy team four days later on March 21st, you had met George Papadopoulos?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall first meeting with Mr. Papadopoulos.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you recall whether you spoke with him on the phone prior to his being announced as one of the foreign policy advisers?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't, actually. There were a

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number of people that participated in calling individuals, and, so, I don't recall contacting him personally at this point before the first meeting. It's possible, but I don't recall that.

MR. SCHIFF: And do you recall having any contact with Carter Page before that -- before he was announced as one of the foreign policy advisers?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall a personal conversation with him about being part of the team.

MR. SCHIFF: And who do you remember speaking with prior to the President's announcement of who the foreign policy advisers would be?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I talked to Jeff Miller, Congressman Jeff Miller from Pensacola, and he agreed to help us, I believe. He signed up as a member.

I remember Keith, Dr. Keith Payne, a nuclear expert on nuclear issues. I was pleased that he joined us. I was very pleased to have him on board.

I talked at some point -- I'm not sure -- former Congressman Mike Rogers. Whether it was before that or not, I'm not sure.

Walid Phares, I believe, I may have talked to, and maybe -- Jim Hoskins I think was one of our people. He had an Auburn graduate of Alabama connections, and so I might have heard about him. He had a business and experience.

And so we were putting together persons like that. Some, J.D. Gordon and Sam Clovis, and I'm not sure who else, maybe Rick Dearborn, were talking also to people who appeared and we signed up.

MR. SCHIFF: And which, if any, of those individuals did you meet in person prior to their being announced?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I can't recall for certain. Of course, I talked to Dr. Keith Payne, I believe. Maybe just by phone, but I think I may have talked to him personally. I talked to Jeff Miller several times, and maybe personally. It's conceivable I met others, but I don't have a specific recollection of it, when and where that would have occurred.

MR. SCHIFF: With respect to the robust foreign policy ideas that Stephen Miller represented you had been discussing with these folks, do you recall any robust foreign policy ideas that you were in discussion with prior to the announcement of the President's team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. I think now-President Trump raised a number of important issues. And for some of them, it represented a movement in my thinking. My thinking had already been moving.

One of them was, we were too deeply involved in the Middle East, in terms of trying to create democracies where that's not practical. I had been a total strong advocate of President Bush, and defended him as one of the top defenders in the Senate. But I began to wonder if this was good and were we making progress, considering, for example, Syria and the disaster that's turned out to be, the difficulties we're having now, and the people of Libya are having now.

And President Trump was even more aggressive about Iraq, which I had always supported, but I thought he was making some valid points. He believed we could do better --

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Let me just finish, because this is pretty important to me.

MR. SCHIFF: But my time is limited, so I want to make sure that my

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question is more relevant to our inquiry. So let me narrow it.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. I was -- go ahead.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you have a robust foreign policy discussion with any of the potential candidates for the foreign policy team pertaining to Russia or Ukraine?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not so much Ukraine, but there was -- President Trump had raised the question of Russia and the -- his belief that we should be able to get along with Russia and work with Russia. That was something he said publicly. That's something that I hoped could be a reality.

I talked to quite a number of people for some time about a more realistic foreign policy, a foreign policy more in the Kissinger style than the Wilsonian style of approach to international relations. So that was a pretty big issue too.

A third issue was NATO and them carrying their fair share of the burden. I was intrigued by now-President Trump's ideas on all three: NATO, the Middle East, Russia.

MR. SCHIFF: And on the subject of Russia as well as NATO, which of the candidates for the foreign policy team did you discuss those two ideas?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think I discussed it with most of them.

MR. SCHIFF: So you discussed --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSION: What two ideas? You mentioned --

MR. SCHIFF: Russia and NATO.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. I think we discussed it pretty much with all of them, because we were talking about a shift in our normal strategic thinking to a more realist Kissinger-type approach, where we accepted

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the world as it is and tried to make it better, rather than having a too ambitious goal for spreading democracy when countries weren't ready to do so.

So I think that was the core of it. Also, NATO, the concern there was that the European economy is as big as ours. Their population is greater than ours. And it made no sense, as I believed and Mr. Trump believed, for them to not carry their fair share of the load.

MR. SCHIFF: So then it's fair to say that with respect to the candidates that you were either inviting or vetting to be part of the foreign policy team, you discussed Russia with each of them?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I won't say that, no. I will just say that that was -- those were issues that we tended to discuss, and it was, in a way, the difference in the Trump campaign, and maybe even most of the other candidates.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, now, you did say a moment ago that you thought you discussed the Russia issue with just about all of these candidates. Isn't that correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Mr. Schiff, I want to be honest with you, and I'll give you my best judgment, and best memory. So let me just say to you, honestly and directly, I discussed this with a number of people as we talked about the difference a Trump campaign might make, but I'm not saying I discussed it with everyone, no.

MR. SCHIFF: Is it fair to say you discussed it with most of them?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I discussed it with some of them.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, we've come quite a distance since your first comment that you discussed it with all of them to many of them to some

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of them. What is your best recollection in terms of discussions you had with potential candidates for the foreign policy team? Was Russia and NATO a part of the --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: And the Middle East.

MR. SCHIFF: -- core discussion?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSION: I think Russia, NATO, and the Middle East were three of the important issues that people of sophistication in foreign policy recognized that Trump had a somewhat different view than the current mainstream thinking.

MR. SCHIFF: And you were interested in finding out whether these potential candidates could align themselves or were already aligned with the President's views on Russia, NATO, and the Middle East?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I was looking for good people to be willing to help Mr. Trump. And if they were willing to do so, I would mention to them these ideas that he was expressing that intrigued me. And they were aware of it also from reading the press, I'm sure. And so that's how conversations of that kind may have occurred.

MR. SCHIFF: And one of the ideas you would have been communicating is that the President wanted a new and more positive relationship with Russia?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That was one of the things, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: Now --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think he believed that there's -- the relationship was more hostile than it should be, and that we had more potential for strategic partnership than was being recognized.

MR. SCHIFF: With respect to Mr. Page or Mr. Papadopoulos or

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Mr. Phares, do you recall having any conversations with any of those three on this subject, that is, having a different relationship, a more positive relationship with Russia, prior to their being announced as a part of the President's team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not individually, but that's likely. I don't recall specific individual conversations with them. Perhaps with Dr. Keith Payne, because I sought his advice. I asked a number of people -- I personally asked a number of people, did -- how they felt about these issues, so I could perhaps share thoughts with Mr. Trump, what kind of feedback we would get from those kind of changes in foreign policy, although I did not, on a regular basis, brief Mr. Trump about those matters.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you discuss with the President, prior to his announcement of the foreign policy team, who -- to sit on it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it went something like this. I'll just tell you how it went. After I endorsed Mr. Trump, I talked to Corey Lewandowski and I asked him if it would be appropriate for me to talk to some people that I knew -- many were Bush foreign policy experts -- and get their views about foreign policy. And he said, oh, yes.

The next day he calls back, we want you to head the defense team. That's kind of how that went. You're supposed to go out and find some people to endorse us and head our defense team, basically. And -- but that wasn't so easy, frankly. I was a United States Senator with a lot more to do. I probably should have said no. But I did want to help, and so I set about to get people.

So J. D. Gordon, I believe, was helping, and Sam Clovis was helping. Others were talking. And we were trying to just -- I didn't interview people to say, do you meet high standards? We didn't do background checks on people before

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they agreed to help us and didn't function in the most effective way, in all honesty. I feel like I -- I think a person that had more time and ability could probably have done a better job with that committee than I did.

MR. SCHIFF: But did you, Mr. Attorney General, talk to the then-Candidate Trump about the candidates to be on this foreign policy team prior to his announcing them?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I discussed it with him. I could have, but it would be very general and cursory.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you know where he would have gotten the final list of names as to who was vetted by you and Mr. Gordon and Mr. Clovis or others prior to his announcement of them?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think J. D. Gordon was trying to -- I'm sure sharing that information. Maybe also my chief of staff, Rick Dearborn, may have had information that they shared with the names.

Our first challenge was to get a group of people that would publicly announce for him. And that was the meeting at the Trump Hotel here. It was -- had some talented people on it, some with not very much name ID, but it was the best we could do at the time.

MR. SCHIFF: And do you recall how Mr. Papadopoulos came to be part of the team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I actually don't. I'm not sure where his name came from.

MR. SCHIFF: And you don't know whether you spoke with him before he was named to the team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall whether I talked to him

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or not before he came to the team.

MR. SCHIFF: But you do recall his being at the meeting, the first meeting of this group?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes, I do.

MR. SCHIFF: And what do you recall of his participation at the meeting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I think we went around the room. And the format was that Mr. Trump was sitting at the head of the table, and I believe we started on the right -- Mr. Phares, from the picture, was there -- and went around.

And he talked about having contacts of some kind in Russia. I don't remember exactly what he indicated there. And that he could, perhaps, talk to them. And I was a little bit taken aback by that. I didn't feel like he had -- I felt like -- and I'm the chairman of this group -- I should not do anything that indicated to Mr. Papadopoulos that he was authorized to go to Russia or anyplace else to represent the Trump campaign and do some sort of negotiations. So I pushed back pretty sharply on that. That's the gist of it. Nobody had more than a few minutes to share thoughts with Mr. Trump, but they talked about whatever issues that they wanted. Dr. Payne made a really impressive presentation about the world strategic nuclear issues.

MR. SCHIFF: Attorney General, if I can keep you focused --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: So that's the way that went.

MR. SCHIFF: -- on Mr. Papadopoulos.

So the gist of what Mr. Papadopoulos had to say was that he had contacts within Russia that he could use on behalf of the campaign, or precisely what was he advocating?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He indicated that -- well, the article that came out, and it quoted him when he entered his plea where he said -- it quoted what he said, I think it's generally what I would recall about it. I mean, I can't say whether that was what I read in the paper that refreshed my mind, or my independent recollection of it.

And so he indicated that he had -- he could go to Russia, as I recall, and he could maybe set up some sort of meetings with Russian leadership, maybe Mr. Putin. And I thought this was, you know, something that we need to be giving great thought to. He didn't need to be going to Russia, leaving a meeting with President -- Donald Trump, suggesting to the Russians that he could speak for Donald Trump and his campaign. So that's why I pushed back.

MR. SCHIFF: But you had conveyed or others had conveyed there was an interest on the President's part in furthering the relationship with Russia, correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, at a strategic level, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: You mentioned the criminal information to which Mr. Papadopoulos pled. I believe it was in January, according to the public reports, that Mr. Papadopoulos may have first been contacted by the FBI in a chain of events that ultimately led to that plea. When did it first come to your attention that Mr. Papadopoulos had been interviewed by Federal agents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I had any information about it other than what I read in the papers. I have -- you know, Mr. Mueller's investigation I've recused myself from, and I've rigorously maintained a distance from that and have not sought information about it.

MR. SCHIFF: Is it your testimony then, Mr. Attorney General, that the first time you learned that Mr. Papadopoulos had been in touch with Federal agents

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was when you read about his criminal information?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I don't recall right now any other information about that, unless it was published.

MR. SCHIFF: So no one in the administration alerted you that Mr. Papadopoulos had been in contact with Federal agents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall it.

MR. SCHIFF: In the criminal information, Mr. Papadopoulos mentions meeting with a professor in Italy who had contact with Russian authorities. Were you aware that he had met someone who has been referred to as the professor prior to your reading the criminal information?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. I do recall that he suggested he had contacts, and he could use those contacts, to further the Trump campaign in some way with Russian officials. I just felt like I didn't know enough about this person, and that he should be, in any way, authorized, empowered to go out and negotiate anything like this, and so that's why I pushed back pretty hard.

MR. SCHIFF: In the criminal information — let me ask you this way: Were you ever made aware that Mr. Papadopoulos was informed that the Russians had Democratic or Hillary Clinton emails?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, other than the media.

MR. SCHIFF: So prior to reading it in the media, no one during the campaign informed you that the Russians had communicated to Mr. Papadopoulos that they were in possession of stolen emails?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. Not -- go ahead.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, Mr. Attorney General, you say you don't believe so.

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Isn't that the type of thing you would remember if --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I would remember if he announced that he had access to emails about Hillary Clinton. I think I would have remembered that, and I don't remember it.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, separate and apart from him announcing it, if Mr. Papadopoulos had told others in the campaign that he reported to and they had informed you that the Russians had communicated to Mr. Papadopoulos that they had emails, would you remember that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think so. I think I understand your question, and I think I would have remembered if anybody told me that.

MR. SCHIFF: So you have no recollection during the campaign of anyone telling you that the Russians had communicated with the campaign that they had Hillary Clinton emails?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Repeat that.

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. Did anyone during the campaign inform you that campaign personnel had been notified by Russian sources that they were in possession of Democratic Party or Clinton emails?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so, no.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you have any discussion with Sam Clovis about Mr. Papadopoulos?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I could have. That may have been where he came from. I'm not sure how Mr. Papadopoulos arrived. Somebody had contact with him, as did a number of the people, when they arrived.

MR. SCHIFF: After the -- after the March 24th meeting, Mr. Papadopoulos emailed Sam Clovis, along with other members of the campaign, Mr. Manafort,

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Lewandowski, and perhaps others, explaining that he had met with his good friend, the professor, who had introduced him to a female Russian national and the Russian Ambassador in London.

Did Mr. Clovis or anyone else on the campaign, Mr. Lewandowski or Mr. Manafort or others, ever inform you of that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. In other words, he communicated to them? I'm not familiar with this email. Would you repeat it again?

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. Mr. Papadopoulos, after the March 24th meeting, emailed Sam Clovis, along with other members of the campaign.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: March 24th, is that the Trump Hotel meeting you're referring to?

MR. SCHIFF: Yes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. I have a timeline. Okay, go ahead. So after that he emails Sam Clovis?

MR. SCHIFF: He emailed Sam Clovis, Mr. Lewandowski, Mr. Manafort, potentially others, about meeting with Russian nationals, and claimed that the meeting topic was arranging a meeting between us and the Russian leadership to discuss U.S.-Russia ties under President Trump.

Mr. Clovis responded that he would work it through the campaign and added, Great work. Did Mr. Clovis ever communicate that information to you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. It's conceivable. I know -- I do recall from the meeting at the hotel, he claimed they have contacts with Russia so -- that he could call on in some way. But I don't -- I certainly had no communication with Mr. Clovis about urging him to go and do any specific

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thing.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Manafort forwarded –

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe Mr. Clovis shared that with me.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Manafort forwarded the email to Rick Gates with a note that said: "We need someone to communicate that DT is not doing these trips. It should be someone low level in the campaign so as not to send any signal."

Do you recall that communication? Did anyone ever share that with you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I ever saw that and had not heard that until today.

MR. SCHIFF: How many interaction did you have with Mr. Manafort during the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not much.

MR. SCHIFF: Did Mr. Manafort --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Before the Convention, we were worried about the delegates at the convention. There were efforts to, you know, undermine Trump delegates. And so Mr. Manafort had been experienced in managing conventions for Ronald Reagan even, a number of them. So there were some discussions about delegations and rules that I had some conversations with Mr. Manafort about.

MR. SCHIFF: In the context, did you have any conversations with Mr. Manafort about the Ukraine language in the party platform?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I did not. I had one conversation with him about the Ukraine at Trump Tower, when he -- it had been in the papers that he had improperly or he had supported a candidate that was not the United

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States candidate. And he gave a little explanation to me about why he thought -- he just kind of wanted to tell me he thought he did the right thing. And we never had another conversation about it.

MR. SCHIFF: And what was his explanation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It was something to the effect that in the long run this pro -- the more pro-Russian candidate would be good for America and would be a positive thing for the country.

And I had not been -- I was a Timashinko (ph) fan and been to Ukraine before. I wasn't interested in being for the other guy, the guy he campaigned for. So we didn't discuss it any more. He just -- I guess he just wanted to kind of tell me he was a good guy and thought he was doing the right thing when he did this.

MR. SCHIFF: And he explained somehow how the pro-Russian, anti-Western candidate would be better for the West?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He had some explanation for it.

MR. SCHIFF: But you don't recall the specifics of it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. It was just a brief conversation.

MR. SCHIFF: Now, the email that I mentioned from Mr. Manafort to Mr. Gates suggesting that someone low level in the campaign undertake this Russia trip, not the candidate himself, do you remember having any discussion with anyone on the campaign about it being preferable to having low-level campaign people travel to Russia rather than the candidate himself?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I do not.

MR. SCHIFF: Does that run contrary to your own sentiment that you expressed, in terms of not having lower level campaign people travel to Russia to represent the campaign?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I gave -- I have not given any thought to that. I'm not -- this is a new thought that this had been proposed. So I've not given any thought to it, and did not at the time. I was not asked about it, to my knowledge, and made no opinion about it.

MR. SCHIFF: Were you aware of any effort or any contrary thinking within the campaign that it would be beneficial to the campaign to have lower level people approach Russia in Moscow, because they could do it in a more discreet manner than the candidate?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall any discussion about that.

MR. SCHIFF: When did you first come into contact with Carter Page?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I believe he was -- was he at the Trump Hotel event? We got that picture. I forgot whether he was there or not. I don't have the picture with me.

MR. SCHIFF: I don't believe he is in the photograph.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't --

MR. SCHIFF: Not in the photograph I have, anyway. And --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I had heard of Carter Page through, I suppose, probably J.D. Gordon or my chief as somebody who wanted to help in the campaign. I was not -- I had no belief that he was a heavyweight person that added a great deal to our effort, such as Jeff Miller or Dr. Keith Payne would do.

MR. SCHIFF: So when is the first contact that you do recall with Dr. Page?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I see his testimony is that he was at the dinner that I hosted for the team, and that he said he spoke to me as he left. I had not -- I would not have recalled that until I saw that testimony. So I don't

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know when I may have seen him personally. I don't have a recollection of it. I knew about him and I knew about Papadopoulos, because their names were being bandied as part of the team that was prepared to support Trump.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, before I leave Mr. Papadopoulos completely, you had the interaction with Mr. Papadopoulos during that March meeting. Did you have any further communication with him in person?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He may have been at the dinner that I hosted in – June 16th.

MR. SCHIFF: And that dinner was where?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: At the Capitol Hill Club.

MR. SCHIFF: And do you recall having any conversation with him at that time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall any specific conversation with him at that time. He could have been there.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you recall any other communication with him, in person or over the phone or in writing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: So the only specific recollection you have of interacting with him was at the March meeting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That is correct.

MR. SCHIFF: And --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Now, I did meet and talk with on the phone, trying to -- look, our goal was to try to get as many people as we could get to be supportive of the Trump campaign, and it was not easy in the foreign policy area. So people, names appeared. They were not heavyweight folks but wanted

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to be active, and we accepted them. But I did not have a lot -- any particular personal conversations and directions -- interactions with Mr. Page or Mr. Papadopoulos, to my knowledge.

MR. SCHIFF: So you may have spoken to Mr. Papadopoulos prior to that March meeting, but you don't have a specific recollection?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think that's fair to say.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, at that March meeting, I think you indicated that you did not believe that Mr. Papadopoulos' suggestion that he undertake meetings with Russians as a representative of the campaign was a good idea. Did you express that at the meeting, or was that just a private view that you held as you listened to Mr. Papadopoulos?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I expressed it. Actually, I thought it would be healthy for everybody to hear it. This committee was not any serious -- a group of people authorized to speak for President Trump, and they absolutely weren't authorized to go around the world pretending to represent him.

So I just thought it was a good statement to make quite clear. But I was worried about the tone of his remarks, so it was a response to what he said.

MR. SCHIFF: And what worried you about the tone of his remarks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, he just indicated that, well, I've got contacts in Russia and I can go over there and set up things on behalf of the Trump campaign. And I didn't think that was a good thing.

MR. SCHIFF: Was Mr. Manafort present at that meeting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SCHIFF: Did anyone speak up with a contrary view?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I did.

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MR. SCHIFF: I mean, apart from yourself.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall it.

MR. COOPER: Contrary to the Attorney General's view?

MR. SCHIFF: Contrary to the Attorney General's view.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Oh, no, not to my knowledge.

Nobody, to my knowledge, objected to what I said.

██████████ Five minutes.

MR. SCHIFF: During that March meeting, was lethal assistance to Ukraine discussed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. When it went around the room, everybody had some comments to make. And so, it could have been mentioned, but I don't think so.

MR. SCHIFF: We could provide this if it's helpful. Rick Dearborn drafted a memo about the meeting which provides, in part: "Based upon foreign policy discussions in D.C. with the nominee in March regarding support to Ukraine, lethal assistance was a geopolitical concern raised in the discussion."

Does that refresh your recollection at all about --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it could have happened. I don't recall seeing that memo, that email, but it could have been raised.

MR. COOPER: And, Mr. Schiff, if I might say, thank you for noting that. And I think we would be very much interested, because it's certainly the first we've ever heard about any such memo. I'd very much like that.

MR. SCHIFF: Can we have a copy of that we can --

MR. COOPER: Thank you.

MR. SCHIFF: You bet.

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In terms of Carter Page, do you recall meeting him at the dinner at the Republican Club?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall it. But I saw his deposition, his testimony, and he indicated he was there and he spoke to me as he left. And that's quite possible. I don't dispute that.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you recall him telling you that he was going to go to Russia?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: Given the concerns that you expressed when Mr. Papadopoulos suggested that he could go to Russia and establish contacts, and that worried you, if Dr. Page told you he was going to Russia, wouldn't that have raised the same concerns with you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I don't know the context of it. I noticed his deposition said that it looked like it went in one ear and out the other, talking to me, about me. So I don't know that I understood what he was saying or the fact that he was going to Russia, if that's what he, indeed, said, that that would raise the same problems of Mr. Papadopoulos saying, I'm going to Russia to plan a meeting with the leadership or Putin or whoever he said he could do. That was way beyond what I thought was appropriate at that time.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, if any of the foreign policy team communicated to you that they were going to Russia and communicated this to you at a campaign event, wouldn't that have raised the same concerns that you expressed about Mr. Papadopoulos saying that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I just don't recall, Mr. Schiff. I just -- I don't recall what he said or how it could have happened. I don't dispute

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that he may have said that, but it didn't register to me and I didn't respond, apparently, according to him.

MR. SCHIFF: Have we provided the exhibit?

[REDACTED] Yes, sir.

MR. SCHIFF: How much time do I have left?

[REDACTED] Two minutes, sir.

MR. SCHIFF: Okay. Let me turn to a separate matter and I'll come back to that when we have another opportunity.

Mr. Attorney General, last night, Fox News ran an evening segment saying it was in possession of an internal memo from the committee calling on the chairman to pursue congressional compliance actions against DOJ and FBI for not releasing documents and withholding an FBI witness, and recommending that the House pursue contempt citations.

A couple hours later the President tweeted: The House of Representatives seeks contempt citations, question mark, against the Justice Department and the FBI for withholding key documents and an FBI witness which could shed light on surveillance of associates of Donald Trump. Big stuff. Deep State. Give this information now. @FoxNews.

Attorney General Sessions, do the President's tweets, including last night's tweets, in your view, constitute a directive to you, as Attorney General, or to the Justice Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I don't consider that a directive to the Department of Justice.

[REDACTED] One minute.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I -- I'm not sure I fully

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understand everything that you just said, but -- exactly what the President said and what he was precisely referring to, but I don't -- we've cooperated with the committee pretty fulsomely, I think. There are some things that -- that have been withheld, like FISA transcripts. But I believe that, in terms of money paid by the FBI and the dossier, that's been revealed, although this matter is in the breadth of the Special Counsel, Mr. Mueller, and I am not engaged in it, and decisions are being made by the appropriate persons, either in the FBI or the Department of Justice.

Are we going to fulfill our duty to this committee? As long as I'm Attorney General. We're going to handle our operations honestly, with integrity, with professionalism and according to the best judgment I can give to it. And I've done that since I've been Attorney General.

And I respect demands Congress has made. I respect the concerns of the President. I respect the concerns of the American people. But we have to try to do the right thing in the end every day, and that's what we try to do.

MR. SCHIFF: My time is out. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. ROONEY: Mr. Attorney General, welcome. Thank you for your service in the Senate, and as Attorney General.

I want to just ask you a few questions and then turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Gowdy. You know, I was part of the last campaign as well, in full disclosure. I was the campaign chairman for Marco Rubio in Florida, and did a great job. That's supposed to be a joke.

But it's interesting that, you know, when you talk about setting up your team and you talk about setting up your foreign policy committee, I have a little experience in knowing how that works, and we are very proud of our foreign policy

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team. And I remember when a lot of the people in the foreign policy realm talked in a letter about Mr. Trump and were signing up with other campaigns, remembering what you were going to do as far as your team goes.

So it sounds like your testimony was -- and correct me if I'm wrong here -- but that you basically were trying to get whoever you could get to be on the team. And I don't mean to say you were scraping the bottom of the barrel with the names, but is it kind of the -- in your role as the chairman of the foreign policy committee for Mr. Trump's campaign, is it your testimony that you were sort of working behind the eight-ball trying to get the top tier names in the foreign policy realm?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, that's correct. Marco Rubio —

MR. ROONEY: Jeff Miller, our former colleague here, excluded.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Jeff was a good catch. But Marco had a big group. I guess Jeb Bush had the biggest. Marco had a big group. And that represented pretty much the Republican foreign policy establishment, those candidates right there. And some others had supporters too.

So Trump had scared them. It was no little thing to get people to sign up. We did not function well as a committee. I don't feel like I led very well. I do -- one member has told me, well, we did more than you know. We did 130 op eds and did some stuff. But I was not monitoring everything the members were doing, and I feel like I could have done a better job. But it was not easy. You're right. I mean, this was not an easy thing to get people to sign up for foreign policy.

MR. ROONEY: When you say if you could have done it again or if you had more time, not being -- if you weren't a Senator, would you say that you would

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have -- when you say you would have done a better job, does that include like vetting some of the people that you were working to get on your committee and knowing who they were and what their backgrounds were?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. And perhaps we could have been able to win over some people that could have been supportive but weren't properly approached, and enough time was not spent with them to get them to come on board. Because in many ways, the Trump realist foreign policy had a lot of intellectual support out there. Maybe a minority within the community, but it was -- but his personal style had -- frankly, was off-putting to some of the professional foreign policy experts.

MR. ROONEY: We've heard the minority talk in its line of questioning at length with regard to Mr. Papadopoulos and Carter Page. Let's focus on those two briefly. The infamous photograph there that Mr. Schiff has that everybody's seen that was taken at the foreign policy meeting that Mr. Trump attended, were you aware of everybody that was in that room and their backgrounds, or just how familiar were you with that team as it sat there at that meeting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I was not that familiar with them. I had not done background checks on any of them. A few I knew, like Congressman Miller, my neighbor in Florida. And I knew Walid Phares from television more than I did know him personally.

Dr. Keith Payne was the -- a critical part of the Schlesinger-Perry, a nuclear posture review that was done 4 or 5 years ago, which, from my subcommittee I knew him well and I thought he was a premier foreign policy thinker on nuclear issues. For the rest of the group, it was not -- if I had the picture, I might remember a few.

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MR. COOPER: Mr. Schiff, would you mind?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: But the rest of the group was not of that status, frankly, just were not. I mean, we just didn't have people of -- a lot of people of a high status.

MR. ROONEY: With regard to Mr. Papadopoulos --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I see Mr. Smith was the Inspector General in Iraq, so he was a pretty prominent and a well-recognized person.

MR. ROONEY: Right.

With regard to Mr. Papadopoulos, aside from telling him, as he raised in that meeting, that he had contacts in Russia and that he was willing to go there on behalf of Mr. Trump, to which you testified that you said that's not what you want or you don't think that's a good idea, did you have any other communication with him directly, either casually or professionally, during the campaign, through email, phone call, that you had spoken to him that you can recall?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall that. I'm sure I had no emails with him, and I don't recall any follow-up conversations.

MR. ROONEY: So, as much as you can recall, your only interaction with this guy is when he spoke up at a meeting that you didn't know who he was, aside from on paper, before this meeting that he says, Hey, I have contacts in Russia, I want to go there on behalf of Mr. Trump, to which you said, no, and that's it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That's basically correct.

MR. ROONEY: Okay. With regard to Mr. Page, we've had him in here to testify. That testimony is public, which you've indicated that you've looked at. He testified that he met with you at the Capitol Hill Club as he was walking out the door, and your testimony was is that you don't remember that meeting.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't remember that.

MR. ROONEY: Do you have any other -- did you have any other contacts with Carter Page, assuming that happened, before or after that that you can recall?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall him before or after that. It's possible before, but I don't -- I'm pretty certain not afterwards.

MR. ROONEY: Did you know who he was, just generally, aside from a name on a page on a list that you were given?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It seems like I was told he was in the oil business, or was that Papadopoulos? I've forgotten which. But they had some background internationally, and he had some foreign policy background that would justify him apparently being on the committee. But I never considered him or Mr. Papadopoulos a -- the kind of foreign policy adviser that would reach a high level.

MR. ROONEY: Why?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I didn't feel like either one had -- apparently had a background of significance that would indicate that they had contributions to make.

MR. ROONEY: So them being on this team, was it just simply because we needed -- or you needed names on a list or you needed to refute the narrative out there that, you know, the Trump campaign is thin and doesn't have sort of like the gravitas of Bush and Rubio or --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That's the best we could do at the time.

MR. ROONEY: So is there a difference -- I know Mr. Schiff was referring

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to the meeting -- this meeting that's referred to in the picture, which was a foreign policy meeting, Mr. Papadopoulos saying he could go to Russia on behalf of the campaign, you saying no, versus a meeting after a dinner at the Capitol Hill Club where Carter Page, assuming he said, Hey, I'm going to Russia to speak at a commencement, that those two things would be distinctive to you or that you should have remembered the second one if you remembered the first one? Can you talk about that, if possible?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, looking at Mr. Page's testimony, he didn't say he was going to speak at a commencement, I don't believe. He basically said he told me he was going to Russia. But your mind gets -- plays tricks with you, because he did say he was going to make a commencement address, but I'm not sure he ever said he told me that.

But it didn't strike me, obviously, as significant as Mr. Papadopoulos saying that he wants to set up a meeting for Mr. Trump or somehow be the inner connecting link between the Trump campaign and top Russian officials. That was -- I didn't feel like he was qualified to fill that role.

MR. ROONEY: Why didn't that strike you, the difference between the two statements, Carter Page --

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[10:04 a.m.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That's quite a bit of difference, I would say, as I've described it. He's talking about actually being a key player in this event, that I didn't -- I wasn't prepared to sit silently about.

In other words, if you sit silently, and somebody in that room says, I can go set this up, Mr. Trump, and let me take care of it and nobody says no, then he can go to Russia and start portraying himself as some sort of official representative of the campaign, and we certainly didn't know enough about him at that point to empower him in that way.

MR. ROONEY: You were asked by Mr. Schiff with regard to Mr. Papadopoulos – sorry to keep flipping back and forth between these two guys -- but Mr. Papadopoulos being aware that there was emails from Russia about Hillary Clinton that he had access to apparently that -- and you -- your testimony was that you were not aware that that was out there.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I certainly had no clear understanding.

MR. ROONEY: Well, I guess the inference would be that if, you know, you were going to connect the dots, that if you were the head of the foreign policy team, and this guy was on the team, and that he had apparently had Russians telling him that he had Hillary Clinton emails, that the inference would be that you being the chair or the head of the foreign policy team would know that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I didn't know that, I will just say it that way. But I want to be clear, and I don't want to delay us, but I think I understood your question, and I think I've answered it correctly.

MR. ROONEY: Well, I think, just to try to clear it up, if this inference is

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true, that Mr. Papadopoulos had Russian communications that they told him that they had Hillary Clinton emails, and he's part of the foreign policy team, and you're the head of that team, that the inference would be if that was all true that you would know about it too, because you're the head of the team that he sits on. And your testimony is is that that's not true?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I did not know that.

MR. ROONEY: Okay. Mr. Attorney General, our parameters of this investigation are not criminal in nature. They are to write a report, to try to make the Intelligence Community better, with regard to the things that happened during the last election cycle.

And the parameters that were agreed upon by the majority and the minority were set out, and I'm going to read you those parameters and ask you if you can help us with writing that report so that the Intelligence Community can be the best that we all hope that it can be. If you don't know the answers to these questions, just say you don't know.

The first parameter was what Russian cyber activity and other active measures were directed against the United States and its allies. In your role during the campaign, can you tell us whether or not there's anything with regard to that bullet that would help this committee?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I have any information that would be helpful to the committee on that. That is, of course, in the breadth of the Special Counsel, and the FBI has done considerable work as the Intelligence Committee -- Community, but I have not undertaken to participate in obtaining their data and the information that they've gathered.

MR. ROONEY: The second bullet is, did the Russian active measures

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include links between Russia and individuals associated with political campaigns or any other U.S. person. So I guess, were you aware of any active measures by the Russians and individuals associated with the Trump campaign or any other U.S. person?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: To transmit or share or improperly obtain data? Is that what you're referring to?

MR. ROONEY: Exactly.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I was not.

MR. ROONEY: The third bullet is, what was the U.S. Government's response to these Russian active measures, and what do we need to do to protect ourselves and our allies in the future?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, we've got a number of things to do: One, plainly, is about the election process. I have urged, and the FBI is working on -- and our Deputy Attorney General is working on, assuring that there's no system by which actual vote tallies can be manipulated. The FBI said they were not in this last election.

We need to set up a better software review system. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So you could have software that has problems.

And then you've got the question of intervening some way through false information, or disinformation to impact a campaign. So those are three things that I believe we as a country need to focus on and do a better job about.

MR. ROONEY: I think -- this is my opinion, but I think the most important of those is obviously the integrity of the ballot. Is there anything that you can do

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at the Federal level -- I understand what you said about the States running their own election.

But at the Federal level, is there anything that you can do to ensure that the integrity of the ballot system -- you mentioned a software program or a software that would do that, but is there anything else that you can do from your level, whether it's mandatory paper ballot backup or whatever that, you know, we should be looking at?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Mr. Rooney, I raised that with FBI at one of our classified briefings, and what they say is that at this point, there's a mechanism in place that should help -- and we know -- we feel confident that this election was not abused -- that we have [REDACTED] that should work.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So whether that's Federal law taking over this process in a greater way than we have, or whether we can create some incentive to make sure that every local jurisdiction that sets up their own voting process has followed the highest standards, I don't know. That's something Congress would probably need to wrestle with -- should wrestle with, really.

MR. ROONEY: And the last one is what possible leaks of classified information took place regarding the Intelligence Community's assessment of these matters. Are you aware of any of the leaks that went on or have anything to add to that?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, we think there are way too many leaks in the Department in this government. And the Department has gotten --

[REDACTED]

But we do need to tighten this up. If we're going to have the FISA approval, 702 approvals and that kind of thing, what I'm hearing from Congress is we're not confident in how well you're managing this.

I totally support the 702 and this process, and the necessity of this information, but I do think we have a higher duty to make sure that the people and Congress is confident that we are administering it effectively.

MR. ROONEY: Well, I appreciate that, especially since we have a vote coming up on that soon. And I appreciate your words of support for that publicly, because we're going to need all the help we can get.

Mr. Gowdy.

MR. GOWDY: Good morning, Mr. Attorney General.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes, sir.

MR. GOWDY: Mr. Rooney went through the four pillars of our jurisdiction. I want to focus on the first two, what did Russia do and with whom, if anyone, did they do it. I want to kind of direct your attention towards a couple of pivot points: the hack of the DNC server, the hack of Podesta's email, the dissemination of that information, and then Russia's social media efforts. So we'll take those kind of one at a time.

And when I ask you whether or not you have any information or evidence, I know you grew up in a courtroom and you're kind of hardwired to exclude hearsay

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and just kind of focus on direct evidence. I don't want you to do that. I want you to tell us anything you know regardless of the source and, frankly, regardless of whether or not you even believed it at the time.

So we'll start with the hack of the DNC server. When did you learn that the DNC server had been attacked or hacked?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I – well, there were two published reports, as I recall it, one was from the DNC itself – I'm not sure when the date was -- that they said that they had been hacked. And then there was -- I'm really recalling this, based on my review recently.

And then there was a point at which WikiLeaks published some of this information, so both of those ~~are~~ pretty much public record. I guess I learned of it in that way. I'm not sure I paid much attention to the DNC's initial statement actually, but -- and I knew nothing about it, of course, before then.

MR. GOWDY: All right. But I want to make sure the record is clear so the report is clear. Did you ever have a conversation with candidate Trump about the hacking or the accessing of the DNC server before it happened?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Did you ever have a conversation with anyone connected or associated with the official Donald Trump for President campaign before the DNC server was accessed or hacked?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Did you ever have ~~a~~ conversation with anyone unofficially connected with the campaign before the DNC server was accessed or hacked?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: We'll get to the --

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MR. COOPER: Excuse me, Mr. Gowdy, a conversation about the hack before it actually came up?

MR. GOWDY: Yes.

MR. COOPER: Thank you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay.

MR. GOWDY: Is that -- did you understand my question to be that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Maybe you better repeat it.

MR. GOWDY: All right. Did you have any conversations with anyone, not Donald Trump, not the official campaign, unofficial campaign, or, frankly, anyone else about accessing or attacking the DNC server before it happened?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: All right. John Podesta's email account, did you ever have a conversation with candidate Donald Trump about accessing, hacking John Podesta's email account before it happened?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Same question, but not Donald Trump, the official campaign, the Trump campaign, any conversations? Overhear anything? Rumors about it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Not Trump, not the official campaign, anyone, Alabama, Washington, or anywhere else about hacking or accessing John Podesta's email before it happened?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: All right. I want to move to the dissemination of it. There are tweets from Roger Stone and the President himself about Secretary Clinton's

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emails. There are tweets about Roger Stone about John Podesta is soon-to-be in the barrel.

I don't expect you to tell us what other people were thinking when they tweeted things, but was there ever a conversation you had with candidate Trump about the dissemination of information accessed during either the DNC server hack or the Podesta email hack?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, no. Now, if you mean by dissemination was it quoted by Mr. Trump in some -- in a speech or something that came out of those leaks and hacking, it's conceivable some discussion was made about the value of it, or the importance of it in a political campaign. But I don't recall that.

MR. GOWDY: You make an important distinction. There is a difference between passively benefiting from the fact that something bad may be happening to someone that you're in a race against, and actively participating in making sure something bad happens to someone that you're in a race against.

So there is the active measures and then the passive measures. So I don't want to talk about the passive measures yet. I want to go back. The word "collusion," I'm not sure most people heard that word up until sometime in 2016, but collusion, conspiracy, coordination, those three words, do they have appreciably different meanings to you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think they're probably the same or close to the same. Distinct, each is distinct, but they represent the same kind of insight or observation of an event.

MR. GOWDY: Well, I'm going to use all three words, and if you think they should be separated out in the question or the answer, I'm going to rely on you to

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separate them out.

Do you have any evidence, regardless of the source, regardless of ever -- of really even whether or not you found it to be credible or not, any information whatsoever, including hearsay, of collusion, coordination, conspiracy between Donald Trump and anyone else to disseminate or publicize the proceeds of either of those two hacks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Collusion or cooperation with Russians or anyone?

MR. GOWDY: Anyone.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, let's see, I want to be careful about what we mean by this because that's a pretty broad question, what we mean by "dissemination." For example, I used the statement that Hillary Clinton had made about open borders. I use that a lot.

We even had a discussion about it. I think it was -- maybe Marco Rubio said you shouldn't quote what was on those emails. It was improper. I remember discussing it with somebody about -- and I decided it's in the public domain, it's out there, I'm going to -- I think it's okay to quote it. So is that what you mean?

MR. GOWDY: Well, there again, that's a good point. That's another distinction. That's -- someone has already made the decision to publicize that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Right.

MR. GOWDY: My question is, were you part of the decision to publicize that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Is there any evidence, regardless of the source, of

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collusion, coordination, conspiracy, between Donald Trump that you're aware of and the decision to publicize the proceeds from those hacks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: All right. I'm not talking about benefiting from unfortunate things happening to political opponents.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: You mean the initial publish?

MR. GOWDY: I'm talking about the decision to publicize it.

MR. COOPER: WikiLeaks publication, is that it, Mr. Gowdy?

MR. GOWDY: If that's who the record says did it, yes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. No.

MR. GOWDY: So what I'm trying to establish is, if you weren't part of the hack itself, and your testimony is no knowledge of the hacks before they happened, the next pivot point to me is the decision from whoever committed the hacks to publicize the information.

So that's the narrow area. Not the benefit from it, not the citing it after it had been publicized, but it's hacked, it's in my possession, I've got to decide whether to publicize it or not.

Do you have any evidence Donald Trump was part of the decision to publicize the proceeds from those hacks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I do not.

MR. GOWDY: Do you have any evidence, regardless of the source, regardless of whether or not you believed it at the time, did you hear anyone discuss -- on the campaign, not Donald Trump, the official campaign -- publicizing the proceeds of those two hacks, the initial publication,

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not the initial publication, no.

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MR. GOWDY: All right. Anyone not officially connected with the campaign, hangers-on, wannabes, people who represented themselves as being part of the campaign, but you didn't know who they wannabe were, were you present for any meetings, did you hear about any meetings about how to maximize the crime committed by someone else, accepting that you've already testified you weren't part of it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so, other than Mr. Stone made some comments in the media.

MR. GOWDY: Did you have any conversations --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: But I never -- I don't believe I ever talked to Mr. Stone the whole time of the campaign, email, phone, or personally.

MR. GOWDY: All right. In my head, the pivot points are the two hacks, the dissemination, then there's been testimony and hearings about Russia's efforts to infiltrate social media platforms. Do you recall any conversations with President Trump about how to collude, conspire, coordinate with the Russians with respect to their social media efforts?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Same question, but not Mr. Trump, anyone in the official campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Same question, not Mr. Trump, not the official campaign, anyone unofficially connected with the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. GOWDY: Mr. Rooney asked you about a couple of names in particular, but I want to just ask you an open question. Carter Page, what is the

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full extent of your recollection of -- now, keep in mind, Carter Page has about seven different definitions for "meeting." I've never met a person with more definitions for meeting someone.

So I think you and I can probably agree on commonly accepted definitions for meeting someone and having a conversation with someone. The full extent of your recollection of meeting or having conversations with, directly with Carter Page?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I accept that he was at the dinner that we were at and would have -- could have participated or listened to discussions that went on there. When he said he spoke to me leaving, saying he was going to Russia, I don't know how he came to be, frankly.

I mean, I don't know how -- who identified him and how he was recommended to serve on this committee. And we probably -- I don't know, in all honesty, whether he would have qualified as a person that had the background and the experience and reputation to justify being on the committee.

I didn't block it. I'd heard of him -- I'd heard his name discussed as being -- willing to serve on the committee and had -- was going to serve on it at some point. But I don't recall talking to him.

MR. GOWDY: Did you recall meeting him at the Capitol Hill Club until you either saw his testimony or read the transcript?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I did not.

MR. GOWDY: As we sit here today, do you recall whether or not it would've been in the foyer of the Capitol Hill Club or under that little awning area out front?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What I recall is we had a dinner in a

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room, one of the rooms, and that -- I don't recall having -- meeting him and having a discussion with him outside in the foyer or whatever. I don't know where he said that exchange took place, or his comment to me took place.

MR. GOWDY: George Papadopoulos, the full extent of your meetings with, conversations with him during the pendency of the campaign.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It's somewhat similar. I'm not sure who recommended him. I didn't know him. I mean, I knew Keith Payne. I knew Jeff Miller. But I didn't know him.

And could I have talked to him by phone or something beforehand and had a brief meeting with him of some kind, it's possible. But the first thing was at this meeting at Trump Hotel here that I recollect, after having my memory jogged by the paper -- recent reports of his difficulties.

MR. GOWDY: All right. I think we have incrementally addressed the accessing of the DNC server, the accessing of Mr. Podesta's email, the decision to disseminate. And I think your testimony is clear on that.

Let's go beyond someone else's decision to disseminate the campaign conversations about whether or not to discuss or make use of what someone else accessed and disseminated. Was there a debate within the campaign about whether or not to -- you quoted Senator Rubio -- whether or not to treat this as ill-gotten gains and not make mention of it, or whether or not to say it's in the public domain, it's fair game?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, Mr. Trump was -- had quoted it, I think, and others on the -- spokesperson had. I certainly -- I remember, I discussed the immigration issue. I usually quoted the email in which our -- some report that said that Hillary Clinton had said she believed in open borders, and I

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always sort of drove that.

So I think different people used different parts of what had been published as effectively as they could to advance the interest of the campaign.

MR. GOWDY: I want to ask you about you. You were in the United States Senate for how many years?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Twenty.

MR. GOWDY: I want you to broadly address your position towards Russia during your time in the Senate and whether or not it changed.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I grew up as a William Buckley anti-Communist conservative, a rock-grip, anti-Communist. But as the years went by, I felt it was pretty tragic that our initial good relations with Russia had eroded, that Putin had gone harder, and that -- and our relationship was deteriorating, and that -- was it not possible that we could restore a more positive relationship with Russia, which would be good for the world, it would be good for Europe, it would be good for the United States, it would be good against terrorism.

And so these are, as I've gotten older, you've got to be careful of these visions because they don't always ripen. If they hadn't ripened yet, maybe there's a reason they hadn't ripened. Nixon did go to China with Kissinger. And so my thought was that there might be an opportunity with Donald Trump to repair that relationship, in which case, it would be a monumentally positive thing for the world. And I asked a lot of people about it.

I talked to the lady at George Washington University who wrote a book on Russia, asked her to come by, talk to me about it, said, is this possible? Is this too risky? And her comment was -- the way I really came down to it was this: It's okay to try, but you have to be willing to walk away if it doesn't develop.

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So that's kind of my philosophy about the approach to Russia, that Trump might be able, with his strong personality, his negotiating skills, somehow make a breakthrough there that would be good for the world and the United States. Hadn't happened.

MR. GOWDY: All right. Same three words: Collusion, coordination, conspiracy. Are you in possession of any evidence, regardless of the source, regardless of whether or not you deemed it to be credible or not, any information, evidence at all of conversations, coordination, collusion, conspiracy between Donald Trump, the Trump campaign, and anyone with whether to or when to disseminate and publish the ill-gotten gains from the two hacks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: If I understand what you're saying, was there any coordination with the publishers of – who had the information and who made it public between the Trump campaign and that group who released it, and the answer is, no, I did not have any information or hear any discussion about that.

MR. COOPER: Whether that group is WikiLeaks or some other source?

MR. GOWDY: No matter the source.

MR. COOPER: Okay.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yeah.

MR. GOWDY: What I'm trying to establish, and we're using words we wouldn't use if we were talking to the average jury, but I didn't have anything to do with taking the emails. I didn't have anything to do with disseminating the emails. You can judge whether or not I should have benefited from the fact that somebody else did it, but I wasn't part of either of the first two. That's what I'm asking.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yeah, I believe my answers are

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correct, and I stand by them.

MR. GOWDY: Mr. Schiff made reference to a tweet. I don't follow the President as closely, perhaps, as I should on social media, so I was not aware of that until my friend from California made reference to it.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I heard it briefly this morning, but I'm not to the bottom of it.

MR. GOWDY: Well, I've got it here. It is difficult to unlock the mysteries of the world in 140 characters. Sometimes these issues are a little more complex.

I have zero interest in discussing an ongoing probe. I try really hard not to ask you or either of your two predecessors about ongoing probes because you can't talk about them, and it's not fair to make you say you can't talk about them.

On the other hand, I think it is legitimate for committees of oversight, whether it is this committee or the House Judiciary or our brothers and sisters in the Senate, to ask whether or not the world's premier law enforcement agency relied upon certain information in court filings, and whether or not they vetted, corroborated, contradicted, or otherwise investigated that underlying information before they presented it to a court.

So to the extent that Members of Congress really believe that that's a legitimate oversight function, if you are recused from Russia matters, to whom do we address our concerns if we are not satisfied with the depth, breadth, and pace of those productions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, let me explain it this way to all of you. Once I recused myself from the campaign and email issue, I did that because the Code of Federal Regulations said that if you are in -- play a role as a leader in a campaign, an official in a campaign, you can't -- in the Department of

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Justice -- investigate the campaign you were participating in. You should recuse yourself.

Not because I did anything wrong. It's because I have a -- if I'm going to be Attorney General -- I know you, Mr. Gowdy, had served in Department of Justice -- you can't not do what you expect your subordinates to do. You have to be a leader. I mean, it's your responsibility. And so I had -- I felt it was crystal clear, and the senior advice I got was I should not participate in this.

So when I recused, Rod Rosenstein, the Deputy Attorney General, 27 years in the Department of Justice, appointed originally by President Bush's U.S. attorney, he nominated him as the Court of Appeals judge and he didn't get through. He stayed in under the Democrats in Maryland. So that's who Rod Rosenstein is. He is the Attorney General.

Now, he has named Mr. Mueller as a Special Counsel and given him extraordinary leeway to conduct the investigation as he sees fit. But he is that person. He is the Attorney General for the purpose of supervising, in general, the Special Counsel.

And finally, we have the fabulous new Director of the FBI, Chris Wray, the top of his class at Yale, prosecutor in Atlanta, came up with Larry Thompson and Deputy Attorney General as his principal deputy, became the chief of criminal division, and just a man of integrity and judgment. And I think you're all going to grow to like him. He had a very strong bipartisan vote in the Senate. And so that's who's leading these matters.

Now, I've got friends that are furious at me. They say, well, you should be doing all this. But I know I did the right thing. And I believe Mr. Mueller is a tough, aggressive prosecutor, and somehow I hope and pray justice will be done.

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MR. GOWDY: There's a big difference between Congress trying to assert its oversight during the pendency of an investigation and Congress --

[REDACTED] Five minutes.

MR. GOWDY: -- taking a look back at decisions that have been made. I think you served with Senator Ted Stevens. There were some issues surrounding his prosecution, and the House and the Senate both did oversight over the Department of Justice.

Let's take it out of the realm of Russia, take it out of the realm, just go back to your days in Alabama. If there is an arrest warrant presented to a judge, a search warrant presented to a magistrate, is it not proper to ask whether or not the information that was included in that search or arrest warrant was accurate, vetted, investigated? Would that not be a legitimate oversight function to ask the sheriff deputy in Alabama what did you rely upon, and how did you vet it before you did so?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, Department of Justice is not perfect. It has made errors in the past. And oversight is valuable. I think we -- what I understand is that many of the things that this Congress has asked for have been provided.

Rod Rosenstein, I know very promptly made available this individual who was a cooperating witness in the Uranium-One case. For some reason that interview hasn't taken place, but he's made totally available to everybody.

And on this, I understand that the financial aspect of this dossier has been made available to Congress. Other things have been made available to Congress, but there are a few things that Mr. Rosenstein and Mr. -- Director Ray have not provided [REDACTED] or some of that.

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I hope I haven't over spoken about this, because I try to be very circumspect about it. But that's basically what I think is public, and I think most of you know. But I do think that there's not been a total rejection of Congress' oversight with regard to this matter.

MR. GOWDY: I've got 1 minute so I'll just --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: And if you're unhappy, call Mr. Rosenstein and Mr. Wray. I don't know why I keep getting drawn into this. They keep attacking me, and it's not my case.

MR. GOWDY: I'm not attacking anybody. I actually like the Department of Justice. Adam used to work there as well in a previous life. I just --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, you're right to push. There is a little defensiveness in the FBI, in the Department of Justice, and they tend to think everything they did is perfect, and everything they've done is not perfect. I'm old enough to -- I used to be -- I spent 15 years, you know, prosecuting, defending my assistants, and all that. But -- so it's healthy to have oversight.

MR. GOWDY: There is branch tension. I think what becomes difficult for Members of Congress is when criminal defense attorneys through the discovery process and/or the inspector general receive more information than committees of Congress.

It makes it very difficult, for that committee of Congress -- as you know. You served in the Senate. The Senate and the House created the inspector general program, so how the Department of Justice would make more information available to an entity that Congress created than they do the entity that created that entity is sometimes hard for Members of Congress to get their arms around.

But with that, I think I'm out of time.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I would note that IG's information is -- under the rules, gets made public, their reports more than FBI investigations could make probably.

MR. ROONEY: Mr. Sessions, do you need a break?

MR. COOPER: Yes, he does.

MR. ROONEY: Five minutes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. Thank you. I do actually.

[Recess.]

[REDACTED] Fifteen minutes of questioning for the minority.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, I just want to follow up quickly on some of the general questions you were asked about collusion or coordination. In your opinion as a prosecutor, if a foreign power were to offer its assistance in a presidential campaign, and the campaign were to accept that assistance, is that potential evidence of collusion or coordination that might violate a conspiracy law involving U.S. elections law?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I really don't know. I've not researched that. I don't know where the line should be drawn, so I have not researched it.

MR. SCHIFF: You certainly wouldn't advocate a presidential campaign accepting the assistance of a foreign adversary power, would you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. I think this Congress has a right to investigate that, and if laws are violated, so be it; if it's a bad policy, that should be identified.

MR. SCHIFF: With respect to the particular offer of assistance in the form of derogatory information that was made as a preliminary to the Trump Tower

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meeting, was that brought to your attention during the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not aware of that, but -- what offer?

MR. SCHIFF: When it was communicated to the President's son that the Russians had dirt on Hillary Clinton that they were prepared to offer as a part of the Russian Government's effort to help Mr. Trump, was that information brought to your attention?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. And I'm not able -- from the press reports able to confirm your description of it. But it was not brought to my attention.

MR. SCHIFF: Were you aware that the President's son, son-in-law, and Paul Manafort met with individuals of Russian origin under the promise of receiving dirt on Hillary Clinton?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, based on the -- you're referring to the press reports of the meeting that occurred. I was not aware of that before or when it happened.

MR. SCHIFF: When were you first made aware of the meeting at Trump Tower?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I believe it was in the newspaper recently.

MR. SCHIFF: So the first time you learned that Manafort, Kushner, and Flynn -- I'm sorry, Manafort, Kushner, and the President's son, Don Jr., had met with Veselnitskaya and others was when you read about it in the newspaper?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes, that's my best recollection.

MR. SCHIFF: Did anyone during the campaign ever communicate to you

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that they had received an offer of stolen emails from Russian sources?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: And getting back to the general questions concerning coordination and collusion, if senior campaign personnel were in private, secret communication with WikiLeaks, the publisher of the Russian stolen information, would that be potential evidence of coordination, or collusion?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it depends on how you use those words. It could be, yes.

MR. SCHIFF: So if they discussed, for example, the timing of the release of stolen documents, that could be a form of coordination?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think I probably shouldn't opine on that, but I guess, your observations are your observations. Anybody can make their own judgment. They have to make their own judgment about it.

MR. SCHIFF: Was it ever brought to your attention that members of the presidential campaign were in private, secret communication with WikiLeaks, Guccifer 2.0, or DCLeaks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not to my knowledge.

MR. SCHIFF: That was never brought to your attention during the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SCHIFF: In the criminal information filed in connection with Mr. Papadopoulos, it reads, "After several weeks of further communications regarding a potential off-the-record meeting with Russian officials on or about August 15, 2016, the campaign supervisor told Defendant Papadopoulos that, quote, "I would encourage you," unquote, and another foreign policy to the

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campaign to, quote, "make the trip if it is feasible."

Were you aware that a campaign supervisor had told Papadopoulos that he would encourage him and another campaign foreign policy adviser to make the trip to Russia?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I'm a bit confused about news reports that had Sam Clovis being mentioned in that exchange. Is that the exchange you're talking about?

MR. SCHIFF: Well, I believe --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I didn't --

MR. SCHIFF: I believe that there are press reports that the campaign supervisor referred to in the criminal information may be Mr. Clovis.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I would not see him as high a level as the press has suggested. He spent most of his time, I believe, in Iowa. But -- and -- but, to your question, maybe you -- I hate to ask you to repeat it, but if you would, I want to be accurate.

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. The criminal information says that on or about August 15, the campaign supervisor of Mr. Papadopoulos told Defendant Papadopoulos, quote, "I would encourage you," end quote, and another foreign policy adviser to the campaign to, quote, "make the trip if it is feasible," referring to Russia.

Was it brought to your attention during the campaign that a campaign supervisor was encouraging Mr. Papadopoulos and another foreign policy adviser to the campaign to go to Russia?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you need time to take a look at that?

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MR. COOPER: This is the information.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not -- I'm confident that I was not aware of that.

MR. SCHIFF: Now, Mr. Clovis was present at the meeting, the March meeting, was he not?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I don't see his picture, and I'm not sure he was there actually.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you ever communicate with Mr. Clovis that you thought it would be a bad idea to send campaign personnel to Russia?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. Not directly, no.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you believe that if you had made that comment at the meeting and Mr. Clovis was present, that Mr. Clovis would have ignored your comments?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I doubt it. He seemed to respect, you know, his role, which I -- but I really can't say. That's purely speculative on my part.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Castro.

MR. CASTRO: Thank you.

Mr. Attorney General, on April 27, 2016, the day after Mr. Papadopoulos was told by the professor that he had dirt on Hillary Clinton in the form of, quote, "thousands of emails," President Trump delivered his first foreign policy speech at the Mayflower Hotel. You attended this event. Is that correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: Were you involved in the planning?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, other than I knew there was a

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discussion of the Center for the National Interest hosting the event.

MR. CASTRO: How did you know about that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I had gotten to know some of those individuals, I believe, before this. I, in 2015, was asked to do the nominating speech for Senator Tim Kaine, who got an award from him, along with Senator Pat Roberts. Someone else nominated him. They got an award --

MR. CASTRO: But who did you hear that from, a specific individuals or individuals, if you recall?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Somewhere along the way communications developed between – that I was aware that they were interested in the Trump campaign because they were a realist foreign policy think tank.

MR. CASTRO: Attorney General, how were you aware --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: And they were interested in offering the opportunity for Trump to make a formal speech there, and I was aware of that. I probably talked to Paul Saunders and to Dmitri Simes, who was the president, Henry Kissinger is on the board, General Chuck Bard, (ph) four star, is a stellar team.

MR. CASTRO: You've given me more than enough on this. I have some more questions.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. Well, I just want people to know that it's a reputable think tank.

MR. CASTRO: And who else was involved in the planning? Jared Kushner?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Sort of what happened, Mr. Castro, is that I believe that Mr. Kushner worked out the details about this. I was not

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involved in the detail planning on the event.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. How about Rick Dearborn?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He helped some, yes.

MR. CASTRO: Was this while he was on your staff as chief of staff?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. Right.

MR. CASTRO: Was Mr. Dearborn also on your campaign staff or being paid by your campaign at the time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not paid by my campaign, no.

MR. CASTRO: Only on your official staff?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. How about Dmitri Simes. Was he part of the planning?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He was the president of the group and I think probably was the more vigorous leader on this subject.

MR. CASTRO: How about Richard Burr?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He -- I don't know about that.

MR. CASTRO: Were you involved in drafting the President's speech?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I made two suggestions, one was on the question of NATO that Mr. Trump, to allay concerns, should say he'd like to have a NATO conference shortly after he's elected President. I think that was, to some degree, in that speech or he made that statement about that time.

Second thing I suggested was the language that it makes no sense that the cycle of hostility between Russia and the United States should continue, something like that, and a phrase similar to that went in there. But I actually --

MR. CASTRO: Well --

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: -- did not see the speech until maybe the day before.

MR. CASTRO: So you were shown a draft the day before?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: The day before, I believe.

MR. CASTRO: Was it emailed to you or given to you in a physical copy?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall.

MR. CASTRO: Was that produced as part of your documents that were produced?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: If it was on my email, it is produced. There may be some that weren't produced, but -- that we don't have, but most of -- we produced it.

MR. COOPER: And I could maybe help with that, having supervised the effort to gather emails and produce them to the committee. I certainly do not recall that having been in any of the emails or produced to the committee.

MR. CASTRO: Okay.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think it's pretty much delivered as I saw it. But I think they had a number of people that contribute to it.

MR. CASTRO: Sure. And who else was involved in the speech writing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I know Stephen Miller supervised the compilation of it. And I can't recall now, but they had people that reviewed it.

MR. CASTRO: What was Mr. Simes' role in drafting the speech?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not aware of what role he may have had.

MR. CASTRO: I'd like to show you an email, present you an email and

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enter it as Exhibit Number 1, I guess, the first exhibit.

MR. COOPER: Yes.

[Sessions Exhibit No. 1

was marked for identification.]

MR. CASTRO: An email dated April 6, 2016, from Jared Kushner to Rick Dearborn. Drawing your attention to the third line under the heading, which reads, on April 6, 2016, at 11:19 a.m., Rick Dearborn wrote, "Great conversation with Dmitri. I asked the Senator to join on the call."

Do you recall taking a call with Mr. Dearborn and Dmitri Simes?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I may have been on a call about that.

MR. CASTRO: Mr. Sessions, you previously had not disclosed that, have you, to any of the committees that you testified in front of?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, nobody asked me did I talk to Mr. Simes. But I could have been on the conversation. This was about the dinner? The Trump speech? So I was not copied, I believe, on that email. I'm not trying to downplay any role, but I assure you that I did not plan the event. And this summary is pretty much the way I think it went down.

MR. CASTRO: We'll come back to that. Thanks.

The email goes onto say that, "First, a small invite-only dinner for Mr. Trump with foreign policy heavyweights. Sessions would attend. The dinner would be the springboard for discussing foreign policy concepts and ideas in line with Mr. Trump's world view. Advice will be offered on specific items to bring up and include in a major address."

Did this small invite-only dinner take place?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe it did. I think -- how the world works, I think Mr. Simes and his friends would like to have had a private dinner with Mr. Trump, and Mr. Trump didn't find time to do it before the event. So I think --

MR. CASTRO: So it's your position that you were never part of any such dinner or had no knowledge of any such dinner occurring?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not with Mr. Trump.

MR. CASTRO: Were you part of any dinner that didn't include Mr. Trump with these folks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I had at least -- I had several -- at least two, maybe three dinner meetings in which foreign policy was discussed there, organized by the Center for the National Interest.

MR. COOPER: Any prior to the Mayflower speech, if I may?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know if it was prior or not, may have been. I only endorsed Mr. Trump in February, at the end of February.

MR. CASTRO: Thank you for that.

MR. ROONEY: That's time.

MR. CASTRO: Okay.

MR. ROONEY: Trey.

MR. GOWDY: Mr. Attorney General, do you know who Paul Erickson is?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not really. I've seen -- in looking over some of the materials we've produced, I saw an email, I believe, that had his name on it. I'm not sure who he is.

MR. GOWDY: I'm not sure either. The information I have is he's somehow connected with the NRA.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That's my impression.

MR. GOWDY: I believe Mr. Trump spoke in an NRA convention maybe in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2016?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. GOWDY: Were you present at that convention?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I attended and spoke at that convention.

MR. GOWDY: There seems to be some email traffic around trying to set up a meeting between certain Russians or people sympathetic to Russia with Mr. Trump at that NRA convention. Do you know anything about that meeting, whether it took place, whether it was ever communicated to then-candidate Trump?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What I recall about it is that my chief of staff, Rick Dearborn, mentioned that there was a request for a meeting at -- there, and later, at some point, he told me it was not going to happen before we went. And to my knowledge, no such meeting occurred.

MR. GOWDY: I want to switch gears a little bit, and I'm going to try to stay within the four parameters of our jurisdiction. And, Adam, if I stray out of it, you tell me I've strayed out of it.

MR. COOPER: As will I.

MR. GOWDY: As will you, Mr. Cooper.

I do think it's connected, but that's one of three opinions. Mr. Comey had a press conference in July of 2016 where -- you were the United States attorney -- he appropriated a decision to himself that traditionally is reserved for the prosecutor and not for the FBI agent.

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President Trump was inaugurated in January of 2017, and Mr. Comey was dismissed from service in May of 2017. If the decision to dismiss Mr. Comey was based on decisions he made in May of 2016, why was he not dismissed the day of the inauguration?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, the President basically gets to decide who should be the FBI Director. Mr. Rosenstein, when I talked to him about being my deputy, and I had talked about Mr. Comey's performance. And we both felt ■ fresh start was appropriate. And -- but the matter – at some point, we were requested to make a recommendation, and we made that recommendation.

MR. GOWDY: Had you recommended it – while Director Comey may have made errors, they were not job-killing errors, do you believe that recommendation would have been accepted also and he would still be the FBI director?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, there was a complication, an aggravation to it because not long before, I submitted my message with Rod Rosenstein's letter to President Trump. He reaffirmed that he believed he did the right thing just ■ few weeks before that. That was a real concern. I remember Rod was very concerned about that, that he said I did the right thing. I'd do it again, I believe, is what he said.

And then that was so directly contrary to Department of Justice policy that the FBI Director, or the local special agent in charge, doesn't decline ■ case. When this is to the core of order, Rod referred to it as ■ usurpation of the Attorney General's authority for the FBI Director to do that. And so that's – kind of made it worse. And that highlighted it again.

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MR. GOWDY: I can see how it would highlight it, but the usurpation took place in July of 2016. And it -- maybe this is what happened, but it'd be difficult for me to understand how merely reaffirming a bad decision you made is somehow more egregious than the underlying decision.

And that decision was made months and months in advance of President Trump winning and being inaugurated. So was it the reaffirmation? His lack of contrition? His lack of acknowledgment that he made a poor decision in July of 2016, or was it the fact that he made the decision itself in July of 2016 that led to his dismissal?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What I would say to --

MR. COOPER: Could I just ask for a clarification. Are you asking the Attorney General about his state of mind or what he understood to be the President's state of mind at the time of the dismissal?

MR. GOWDY: Well, I would not ask him what the President's state of mind was because I'd be shocked if he knew, so I'm going to restrict it to what he understood, what he was told from people not named Trump.

As I understood his testimony, he and the DAG -- I think my underlying question was, if they had made a separate recommendation to the President, if they had recommended to keep Director Comey, would he still be the Director of the FBI? I think that was my underlying question.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yeah. I'm not -- I don't know what the President would have done under those circumstances. He and I had agreed that a fresh start was appropriate for the FBI. Both of us had some experience with the FBI. He had more recent and longer than I, but I valued his judgment.

Actually, a number of people that I trusted, valued their judgment, had

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indicated a change was probably appropriate. So it wasn't a, I don't think, a problem for Mr. Rosenstein to write the memorandum he did or for me to write the one I wrote.

MR. GOWDY: Well, I'm in a very small universe of people, and it's getting smaller by the day, of people that think Director Comey was in a pretty difficult circumstance in July of 2016. Those were -- it was an unusual fact pattern complicated by -- these are his words -- a meeting on the tarmac potentially complicated by things that he could not discuss publicly.

But that aside, my sympathies for his plot aside, it's a pretty unusual decision for the FBI Director to appropriate a charging decision to himself or herself, and then to go into the detail in which he justified that decision. I've never seen that done before.

And then you fast forward, the decision to notify Congress in October that the investigation was ongoing. There are 100 ways to confidentially notify Congress that something is ongoing. It does not have to be through the U.S. Postal Service, and it doesn't have to be in a public letter. And then there's another letter in November.

So I'm not trying to relitigate whether or not his missteps in 2016 warranted dismissal. I'm trying to understand what happened between the inauguration and the dismissal date that was more egregious than what happened prior to the inauguration date.

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[11:11 a.m.]

MR. COOPER: And before that question is answered, Mr. Gowdy, could you connect up that question with the parameters of the investigation that this committee has commenced?

MR. GOWDY: Well, I think my friends on the other side would say, if we're charged with understanding the U.S. Government's response to what Russia did, part of that response is a counterintelligence investigation. Part of that is a law enforcement response. Part of that is how the FBI responded and whether decisions were made, proper or not proper.

So I would say it is connected to the first prong, the second prong, and the third prong, probably not the fourth prong.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I would just say to you when it became appropriate for Mr. Rosenstein and I to opine, I do believe the reaffirmation by Mr. Comey, of the justification for his position, which I thought was not justified, was a factor, a bit of an affirmation that there was a problem here and a fresh start is better.

I knew Mr. Comey. I think I had a pretty good impression of his strengths and his weaknesses. I knew him, not exceedingly well, but I watched his career.

██████████ Five minutes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I knew the jobs he'd held and voted for him for director.

MR. GOWDY: If he believed in June and July of 2016 that the Department of Justice was either potentially, or via appearance, or in actuality compromised, what should have been the course that he took, in terms of both communicating that and announcing the charging decision?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I would say there are a lot of things that could have been done, but I think Attorney General Lynch probably should have been afforded an opportunity to at least be confronted by the concerns that Mr. Comey had.

He reports directly to the Deputy Attorney General, which is at that time I guess Sally Yates. Certainly, that's his first direct supervisor. So he could have talked to her. And Congress is not unavailable either if there's a real serious matter I think that needed -- that can't be resolved.

But to just go out and announce a decision, violating a lot of rules. As you know, of confirming the existence, particularly in detail of an investigation and basically detailing all of this was pretty -- also violative of standards. Mr. Rosenstein and I agreed before we -- he was nominated that we needed to restore discipline in the Department of Justice, that we've got too many leaks, too much talking about investigations. In the long run, it ends up in a problem bigger than you expected, like Mr. Comey found himself in.

So maintaining discipline in the long run is better, I believe, and trying not to confirm even the existence of an investigation, because it gets you deeper and deeper into the thicket. That was one of our goals. And there was an awful lot of leaks coming out of somewhere.

MR. GOWDY: My time is about up, but it is not lost on me that Mr. Comey identified another way of bringing something to light in 2017, which was the dissemination of memos to a New York Times reporter via a professor friend. And it is equally not lost on me -- and he did so, by his own admission, to trigger special counsel. He did not make that decision in 2016, when others were calling for special counsel to look into certain matters. That was also available to him as

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an option, but he did not go that route. He went a different route.

So I don't know whether my colleagues have any questions about it or not. It just struck me as if the -- if the malpractice took place in July of 2016, May of 2017 was a long time to wait, but if you're saying the reaffirmation of that malpractice and the lack of understanding of how that was the wrong decision played a part in it, only you and the DAG know the answer to that.

So, with that, I think our time is up.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, I just want to follow up on my colleague's questions briefly, and then pass it back to Mr. Castro.

The President, contemporaneous with the firing of Mr. Comey, described his decision as based on his dissatisfaction with Comey's handling of the Russia investigation and not the basis you articulated. Was it also your understanding at the time that the basis in which the President was firing Mr. Comey had more to do with the Russia investigation than any other consideration?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I have been professional, I believe, in refusing to reveal conversations that the Attorney General has with the President. I believe that's consistent with long-established principles of the Department of Justice.

So I can't remember exactly what he said about how it came about that we submitted to him our recommendations. Ultimately, the decision is his, and he made it. And I can't speculate as to all the factors that were in his mind when he made that decision.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, I'm not going to take your time today to litigate with you whether the executive privilege applies here or not. None has been invoked. But you already had that debate, and I don't want to use our time

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today to undertake that again.

I'm not asking you about a specific conversation. I am asking you was it your understanding at the time the President fired Director Comey, that what he articulated publicly, that is, the basis of his decision was the Russia investigation, was that also your understanding of why the President took that action?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, my understanding was that it was appropriate to submit him my recommendation along with Mr. Rosenstein's. And the President made his decision, and I'm not able to evaluate or speculate what the basis of it was.

MR. SCHIFF: I'm not asking you to speculate. Do you know the reason the President fired James Comey, and was that consistent with what the President said publicly about the Russia investigation being his motivation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not able to speculate upon that, and I think it would be improper for me to try to do so.

MR. SCHIFF: I'm not asking you to speculate.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He said -- he's given a statement publicly, Mr. Schiff.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, let me ask you this way --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't remember exactly all that was in it.

MR. SCHIFF: Do you have any reason to believe that what the President said publicly about his motivation in firing Director Comey, that is, it was based on the Russia investigation, do you have any reason to dispute the President's truthfulness when he made that statement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I would just say his statement stands

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for itself.

MR. SCHIFF: Does that mean that you do not have any basis to dispute the truthfulness of it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I would just say that people will have to evaluate that statement and make their own judgment about it, just as well as I would.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Attorney General, I don't believe you are answering my question.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I'm not able to give you an answer. I think -- I don't think I should be speculating upon this matter.

MR. SCHIFF: And I'm not asking you to speculate. I'm asking you to do exactly the opposite. I'm asking you, do you have any basis to dispute -- do you have any basis to believe that when the President said publicly he was firing James Comey over the Russia investigation, do you have any reason to believe that that was an untruthful statement, or was it an accurate description of why the President was taking that action?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I think he said a little more about it than just as you described it, but my recollection is not perfect on it.

I think his statement would have speak for itself.

MR. SCHIFF: So you have no basis to contradict what the President said as to his motivation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think I'll let his statement speak for itself.

MR. SCHIFF: That means you won't answer my question, Mr. Attorney General? If you have a basis to either affirm or disaffirm what he said --

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Would I have a basis --

MR. SCHIFF: -- then you don't have to speculate.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Would I have a basis predicated upon communications between the Attorney General and the President of the United States?

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. And I'm not asking you to disclose communications.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, then that is, in fact, a disclosure, in my opinion, and I would be unable to provide that information.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, that is far from anything within the scope of executive privilege. I'm not asking about the content of the conversation.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It's a communication between the Attorney General and the President; and according to long-established Department of Justice policies, those communications are not to be revealed, absent some appropriate request.

MR. SCHIFF: And I am not asking you to reveal the communications. I am asking you whether you have a basis, and you are refusing to answer the question. And I'll have to leave it at that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I would just -- you know, I want to be open with you, but I feel like it does amount to revelation of a communication to speculate on that, because all I could do is speculate.

MR. SCHIFF: Let me ask you this: Did the President ever instruct you to take any action that you believe would have resulted in hindering the investigation into the Russian interference in our election?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He's not instructed me to do anything improper, directed that that happen.

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MR. SCHIFF: That wasn't exactly what I asked you. So let me be very specific. Did the President ever instruct you to take any action that you believe would have hindered the Russia investigation in any way?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, you're calling for a communication, number one, that I think is inappropriate to be revealed at this time. And number two, I don't think that I can answer that effectively for you.

MR. SCHIFF: Is it your position, Mr. Attorney General, that if the President instructed you to do something that would hinder the Russia investigation that you are prohibited from telling us?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What I would say to you is, first, I would do nothing improper as Attorney General.

MR. SCHIFF: I'm not asking what you would do.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm just telling you I would not do that.

And secondly, you're calling for a communication with the President that I am unable to reveal at this time.

MR. SCHIFF: I'm asking you whether he ever instructed you to take action that would hinder the Russia investigation. That would be a criminal act, Mr. Attorney General. It would not be covered by any privilege. If he did, you should say so. If he did not, you should say so.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I am -- I think I've answered that --

MR. SCHIFF: I don't believe you have, sir.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: -- publicly. I have not been ordered to carry out any unlawful act by the President.

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MR. SCHIFF: Will you answer the question whether he instructed you to take any action that you believe would have hindered the Russia investigation in any way? Will you answer the question?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'll just answer the question, I'll give you the answer again I just gave. I think that's ■ -- the more you go into this, the more you're just asking for me to discuss communications in detail that I'm not going to do today, Mr. Schiff. And you understand that. I've been five committees, 25 hours of testimony, and I have not revealed private conversations between me and the President of the United States, and I don't intend to do so today.

MR. SCHIFF: Then I will take it that you will not respond to the question whether you were ever asked to hinder the Russia investigation by the President, and I will yield to Mr. Castro.

MR. CASTRO: Attorney General, you had some say in the decision about whether Mr. Comey should be fired even after you had recused yourself from the Russia investigation. Is that correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: You acknowledge that in his role as head of the FBI, Mr. Comey played a role in the Russia investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: You acknowledge that you might have been called as part of this investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It's possible.

MR. CASTRO: Yet you still chose to have a hand in his firing.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: The director of the FBI supervises

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35,000 FBI employees, has a budget of \$8 billion, reports to the Deputy and to the Attorney General of the United States. And I made a recommendation on his position for reasons stated in the recommendation we submitted to the President, and I stand by that.

And I don't believe the recusal on a single case that might be under the jurisdiction of the FBI makes me unable to make a major decision of the FBI.

MR. CASTRO: On the biggest case --

[REDACTED] Five minutes.

MR. CASTRO: -- that the country is dealing with having to do with a foreign power interfering with our democracy, you still feel you had a legitimate, and ethical role to play in suggesting he be fired?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Absolutely. I don't think it's a close question.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. I'd like to hand you an email sent on May 10, 2016, from Paul Erickson to Rick Dearborn.

We can mark this email as exhibit No. 2 for identification.

[Sessions Exhibit No. 2

Was marked for identification.]

MR. CASTRO: Have you seen this email? And who is Paul Erickson?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know who Paul Erickson is, and I'm confident I did not see this email until preparation of documents for this committee.

MR. CASTRO: Rick Dearborn was your chief of staff at the time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: You mentioned earlier that he wasn't working on your

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campaign, yet he's emailing from an email address that is [REDACTED]. Is that your official -- was that your official Senate email address account system?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think so.

MR. CASTRO: Not a campaign account?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know. What's the address?

I don't see the address on --

MR. CASTRO: At the top. I'm sorry, I don't think it's on this one. From the April email, he was emailing from a [REDACTED]. Is that a campaign account?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: We all, I think, in Congress use campaign accounts for our email -- our basic email system. So it may have been.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. Did you attend the annual NRA meeting in 2016, May 2016 in Louisville, Kentucky?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. CASTRO: And the email begins: Switch hats! I'm now writing to you and Senator Sessions in your role as Trump foreign policy experts and advisers.

And then continues: Happenstance and the (sometimes) international reach of the NRA placed me in a position a couple of years ago to slowly begin cultivating a back-channel to President Putin's Kremlin. Russia is quietly but actively -- Russia is quietly but slowly beginning cultivating a back channel -- I'm sorry -- actively seeking a dialogue with the U.S. that isn't forthcoming under the current administration. And for reasons that we can discuss in person or on the phone, the Kremlin believes that the only possibility of a true re-set in this relationship would be with a new Republican White House.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, my -- first would say I'm not --

MR. COOPER: Is there a question? Is there a question pending?

MR. CASTRO: Yes. Were you aware of this email or that sentiment that was communicated?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I was not aware of that email.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. In parentheses of exhibit 2 reads: Ever since Hillary compared Putin to Hitler, all senior Russian leaders consider her beyond redemption. World War II is ever present in Russian global politik.

Had you ever heard that President Putin held ill will toward Secretary Clinton?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I think they were -- I think it was generally known. I'm not sure where it was --

MR. CASTRO: But you would agree it sounds like that from this email?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, yeah. But I think people at the time knew that there was some tension between the Secretary of State --

MR. CASTRO: Sure, but I just want to ask about your knowledge and your awareness.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I just would have gotten it from the media somewhere. I don't remember a specific article about it.

MR. CASTRO: How much time do I have? All right.

The next paragraph reads: President Putin's emissary on this front has arranged to attend next week's NRA Annual Meeting in Louisville. He is attending a small private reception that Mr. Trump has (allegedly) committed to on Thursday night, May 19, in order to make first contact. (Nothing more than the presentation of a gift for Mrs. Trump tied to the Russian Orthodox Church -- a fascinating

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artifact.) The reception is being hosted by a nondescript organization called Heroes for Freedom and Liberty (a veterans support group).

Who is the emissary referred to in this paragraph?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I do not know.

MR. CASTRO: Would Rick Dearborn know the answer to that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It's possible.

MR. CASTRO: How much did you communicate with your chief of staff about Mr. Trump and the campaign during the campaign?

MR. COOPER: About this specific event and circumstance or generally?

MR. CASTRO: First about this and then generally.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: All I would say to you is that I was not informed of this, I'm confident.

MR. CASTRO: How often did you speak to Mr. Dearborn about the Trump campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I talked to him regularly.

MR. CASTRO: Every day?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, not every day, but sometimes when we were both in the office all day, we'd communicate a lot.

MR. CASTRO: About the Trump campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, sometimes. But we had a Senate office to run.

MR. CASTRO: I'm sorry?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: We had a Senate office to run, and that was no little matter. And Mr. Dearborn worked hard to -- to --

MR. CASTRO: Would you agree that in this email Mr. Dearborn is trying to

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set up or be part of setting up some meetings with Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin or Mr. Trump and other Russian?

MR. COOPER: Where do you get that from this email, Mr. Castro, if I may?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It seems like Mr. Erickson is --

MR. CASTRO: Well, Mr. Erickson is writing the email to Mr. Dearborn.

MR. COOPER: Then ask about Mr. Dearborn.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: So I don't think it indicates that Mr. Dearborn is trying to set up a meeting.

MR. CASTRO: Okay, we'll come back to it.

MR. ROONEY: Mr. Conaway.

MR. CONAWAY: Thank you. Just real quickly, and I apologize if you've already covered this, Attorney General.

After the convention which President-Elect Trump or President Trump is there, the campaign has a variety of things going on for August, September, and October. What role, if any, did Papadopoulos and Carter play with debate prep, speech preparation, foreign policy development, that you're aware of?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: My observation is zero. They may have had access in some way to somebody that I don't know about, but I'm not aware of them contributing in any way.

MR. CONAWAY: Thank you.

MR. ROONEY: Do you need another break or carry on?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm okay.

MR. ROONEY: We yield.

MR. CASTRO: Back to Mr. Dearborn. You said you spoke to him

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regularly. In your production of documents, have you had a chance to review those with your attorney?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. I've seen, I believe, all the emails.

MR. CASTRO: Well, you'll notice in the production, the documents that you handed over, Mr. Dearborn has a few conversations with different folks about issues related to Russia or Vladimir Putin, two of which we've just gone over.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Right.

MR. CASTRO: Would you agree that Mr. Dearborn was knee deep in the Trump campaign during this time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Mr. Dearborn was a prominent, maybe the senior chief of staff in the Senate, and he knew everybody. He knew the background of a lot of the issues that were developing. And so I think he was very helpful to the Trump campaign.

MR. CASTRO: While he was being paid by you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: And he took -- he worked very hard to make sure he separated his responsibilities.

MR. CASTRO: Would you be willing to provide us the ISP addresses of where these emails came from?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: We will consider that.

MR. CASTRO: Is that a yes or a no, Counsel?

MR. COOPER: I wasn't honestly aware that -- it does look like you have Mr. Dearborn's email address --

MR. CASTRO: I mean the -- I'm sorry.

MR. COOPER: -- shown on exhibit 1.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: This is an email to him. It's sometimes hard to block emails even if it's an official address.

MR. CASTRO: Sure, but there are other emails in your production that show the emails are going from him the other way.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I understand.

MR. CASTRO: I'm asking you what computer network those came from.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not sure, Congressman, that you could assure me that all your staff have never done anything political on a --

MR. CASTRO: Sure, sir, but I'm not in that seat right now.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I understand. I'm just telling you. He worked very hard and was disciplined about not mixing the two the best he can. Now, whether something happens differently --

MR. CASTRO: I understand, but I guess my question for you all, for counsel if he would like to address it --

MR. COOPER: I will.

MR. CASTRO: -- is whether you'd be willing to send us the internet service provider addresses from where these emails were sent and received.

MR. COOPER: Honestly, I'm not sure I'm technically able to understand the nature of your question, but what I will tell you is that we will sit down with you or you and your staff and we will walk through exactly what we've done, the heroic efforts we've made to try to get everything as far as this committee's requests for information and documents; and we'll be completely transparent with all of the electronic access that we have to those documents, absolutely.

MR. CASTRO: Thank you.

I pass this over to Mr. Quigley.

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MR. QUIGLEY: Good morning, Mr. Attorney General.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes, good morning.

MR. QUIGLEY: Good morning.

I don't want to mischaracterize what you said earlier, but it seems that some of the meetings and communications that you became aware of, I think you used the expression refreshed your memory that they may have occurred. Is that about right?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it's certainly true of Mr. Papadopoulos and that meeting. I'm not sure in any way -- I hadn't -- when I was asked some questions about discussions along that line, I did not mention it. It didn't come to my mind when I was asked about it.

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, let's --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think actually, technically, it should have been mentioned, but I will just say that I try to be open and accurate in what I say.

MR. QUIGLEY: And I appreciate that. In the January 2017 Senate testimony, I think your exact language in response to Senator Franken is: "I'm not aware of any of these activities. I've been called a surrogate a time or two in the campaign and I didn't have -- did not have communications with the Russians and I'm unable to comment on that."

Given what you've been refreshed on or recollect of what you've seen in the media that may have reminded you, the totality of circumstances, would you answer that question differently today?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, let me read. It would please me to be able to discuss it with you. I respect this committee. I want you to

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respect me and believe that I didn't do anything intentionally wrong in any way.

This is the question that Senator Franken asked me: "CNN has just -- that day -- just published a story and I'm telling you this about a new story that's just been published. I'm not expecting you to know whether it's true or not, but CNN just published a story alleging that the Intelligence Community of the United States of America, the Intelligence Community provided documents to the President-Elect last week that included information that, quote, 'Russian operatives claim to have compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump,'" close quote.

He goes on to say: These documents also allegedly say, quote: "There was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government," close quote.

Now, again, Franken says: "I'm telling you this as it's coming out so you know, but if it's true, it's obviously extremely serious. And if there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated with the Russian Government in the course of this campaign, what will you do?"

Well, I was taken aback by this. Now, this is apparently on CNN that very day. And I said: "Senator Franken, I'm not aware of those activities," which is the absolute truth. "I have been called a surrogate a time or two in that campaign, and I didn't have -- did not have communications with the Russians and I'm unable to comment on it.

I didn't mean I'd never met a Russian in my life. I meant that I wasn't meeting Russians, operatives, involved in a continuing exchange of information during the campaign, intermediaries of the Russian Government.

So I thought that was a clear and fair response to the charges or the allegation. So forgive me if I'm a little bit passionate about this, but this is where it

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started.

MR. QUIGLEY: I –

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Mr. Quigley, let me finish, please.

This is where this started. And then they come up months later and say, well, you met with Mr. Kislyak in your office. They asked you, did you meet with him? I said, yes, I did meet with him in my office and I had an encounter at the Republican Convention. And now I'm accused of being a perjurer, and I don't appreciate it.

And if I wasn't as clear as I should have been, I'm sorry, but my -- but I believe that I was responding to a dramatic allegation and I wanted to be clear that I hadn't been involved in continuing exchange of information with intermediaries of the Russian Government.

MR. QUIGLEY: Mr. Attorney General, all I wanted to do was to afford you the opportunity to answer the question --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. What's your --

MR. QUIGLEY: -- if it was viewed in a broader sense. So if asked in a broader sense --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Thank you for letting me at least say that, because I respect you and I want you to understand my state of mind when I answered the question the way I did.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. So given a broader question at that time, and not Senator Franken's questions, today can you answer, during the course of the campaign up until the inauguration, the meetings you had with the Russian Ambassador or any other Russians or Russian Government surrogates as you would understand them to be, can you tell us those today?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: You mean any more?

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, any -- no. You met with the Russian Ambassador how many times?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I met with him, as I recall, twice. There was an encounter after I made a speech at the Republican Convention. I didn't -- didn't know he was going to be there. I spoke to a number of ambassadors and other people and was standing in front of the podium and he and I chatted a bit.

Then a month or so later, we met in my office with two to three of my staff. I know two of the staff members who met with me and Ambassador Kislyak are both retired full colonels in the Army, ■ man and woman of the highest stature. And nothing improper occurred in either one of those encounters.

MR. QUIGLEY: Then the April 27th meeting at the Mayflower?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall that. I keep hearing that there's some report that there was a discussion there. If so, I've not seen any report of it.

MR. QUIGLEY: You were there, though? You were there, correct, sir?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes, I was there and he was there in a reception of about two dozen people. And I don't think there's any dispute he was there.

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, if you can recall, where did you -- candidate Trump spoke, correct?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes.

MR. QUIGLEY: And where did you sit during that speech?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I sat on the front or second row.

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MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. And were you aware that the Ambassador sat in that same section?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: There's a video of it that shows him walking past me, which we didn't encounter one another. But I don't know -- I'm not sure where he sat.

MR. QUIGLEY: Besides the speech, were there separate meetings at the Mayflower that day with Russians?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: There was -- before the speech, there was a reception that President Trump attended with about 24 persons. I think that's the best estimate of it. And then the speech followed immediately thereafter in a different room. And I went to a stakeout and did some media questions and comments about how wonderful the speech was and left.

MR. QUIGLEY: So you had no other discussions with the Ambassador or any other representative from the Russian Government or their surrogate?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That is correct.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. At the meeting, the chance discussion that you had at the Republican Convention, how long would you say that discussion took?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Just a few minutes.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. And do you recall what you two talked about?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. Really, I may have mentioned in my speech, I talked about general issues like NATO paying its fair share, the United States, we've got to be more realistic, that in the Middle East we got problems. We should be able to have a better relationship with Russia. China and trade. I mentioned I think trade issues pretty extemporaneously, really. And then he came up to me or I -- I didn't know he was in the audience, and he came

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up to me and spoke. I'm sure, you know, they were pleasant conversations. It was not any hostile conversation.

MR. QUIGLEY: Was there any discussion about Ukraine or sanctions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. QUIGLEY: Any discussion about the platform potentially changing or whether or not it would change, relating to Ukraine?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I know it may be hard to believe, but I was really not involved in that discussion which occurred the week before. I did not -- I was not at Cleveland during that week. And --

MR. QUIGLEY: I meant -- I'm sorry, I meant with the Russian Ambassador. He might have commented on it, given, as you say, it happened the week before.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall that.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. And if I could skip to the September 8th meeting, the discussions there, did they include sanctions and/or Ukraine?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall that being discussed. Well, I recall Ukraine, because the Ukrainian Ambassador had seen me the day before. Because he -- and I'd been to Ukraine a couple of times, I think, but -- not too long before that. I'm sympathetic to Ukraine. And so Mr. Kislyak, just like the old Russians, everything they did was right and everything Ukraine did was wrong, and we don't understand the problem. And we had a little testy conversation about the Ukraine, as I recall it.

MR. QUIGLEY: A discussion about Ukraine with Russians that didn't include sanctions at all?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe it was discussed.

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MR. QUIGLEY: Conceivably, what else would the Russians want to talk about to someone like yourself other than the relief as it relates to Ukraine, in their minds, of sanctions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: There are two sanctions. The Obama administration put sanctions on as the result of a concern over the campaign interference. That was after the election.

MR. QUIGLEY: Correct. The sanctions that we imposed on Russia relating to their activities in Ukraine.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe -- there was certainly no serious discussion about it. I did not make any memorandum. I didn't call the Trump campaign.

MR. QUIGLEY: Did anyone else in the meeting --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know anything about --

MR. QUIGLEY: -- take notes of that meeting? I'm sorry.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't.

MR. QUIGLEY: You don't know if anyone else in your office, anyone else in that office, the meeting on September 8th, took notes, took any sort of memorandum, tape-recording?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It was not tape-recorded, I know. And I believe there -- at least one person had some notes.

MR. QUIGLEY: And do you know who that was?

MR. ROONEY: One minute.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it was a young staffer had about a one-page note, as I recall, notes of it.

MR. QUIGLEY: And would that be available?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: We could make that available for you.

MR. QUIGLEY: We'd certainly appreciate that.

Besides the meetings with the Russian Ambassador, any other direct meetings or indirect meetings you might have had with representatives of the Russian Government or their surrogates?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I don't believe so. Certainly nothing of a significant nature.

MR. QUIGLEY: My time is up.

MR. ROONEY: Mr. Gowdy.

MR. GOWDY: Mr. Attorney General, I know that people don't always like lawyers, but every now and again they ask a little tighter question than a former comedian. So I'm going to go back through Senator Franken's question with you.

I have identified 11 separate factual predicates or inclusions in that wandering, labyrinthine question that he asked you. We'll get to the seminal part before we get to your answer. But if it's true, what in the hell was "it"? He had just made reference to a dossier, continuing exchange of information between the campaign, Trump surrogates and intermediaries, Russian operatives having compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump, and that CNN had just published it.

So I don't know what the hell he meant by if it's true. What is "it"? He just made reference to almost a dozen separate factual predicates. But if it's true, "it" again, it's obviously extremely serious, and if there is any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign communicated. So you get to the word "communicated," you go back to the predicate before that, and the only

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communication he made reference to was there was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government. That's the only communication made reference to.

And your answer is: "Senator Franken, I'm not aware of any of those activities." When you used the word "activities," what were you referring to, because there were about a dozen he made reference to?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I got to say I was focused on the one that it seemed to be suggesting I was in regular communications with the Russians as a surrogate for the campaign, which was totally false and I was anxious to deny. Maybe I should have -- but you're right, there were so many other things involved in that question.

MR. GOWDY: CNN just published a story alleging that the Intelligence Community provided documents to the President-Elect last week that included information that Russian operatives claim to have compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump. These documents also allegedly say there was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government.

So you have salacious information, and then you have constant contact between a campaign, both of which some can consider to be serious allegations, but yet he uses the word if it's true -- if what is true? -- it's obviously extremely serious. Is that the same "it" that he used reference to two words earlier or is that a separate "it"?

And if there's any evidence that anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign -- now we know where he's headed -- communicated with the Russian Government in the course of the campaign, but the only reference he made to

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communication was a continuing exchange of information during the campaign between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government.

So the answer is what it is, but it's also important what you heard and why you answered it the way you answered it. So I'm going to give you whatever amount of time you want, if you want more time, to explain what you heard, what you focused on, and what you were trying to answer.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, recall that I'm not sure anybody even knew about a dossier at this point. But one of the things that made -- you know, was a cause of importance to me was that they alleged our Intelligence Community had delivered this information, and that apparently [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] So that got my attention. I'll admit, it was the sixth hour of my testimony that day, and so your concentration may slip a little bit. But I just felt that I needed to respond.

Now, as a lawyer, I would suggest, Mr. Gowdy, that if a witness makes a statement like that, you might follow up and say, well, have you ever -- you mean you hadn't met any Russians ever in your life? He didn't say that. He knew what I was talking about. He didn't say, when is the last time you met a Russian? Have you ever been to Russia? Yeah. Well, then you're a liar. He didn't say that. He understood what I was responding to. In all honesty, I think he did.

And I think -- I don't appreciate my friend Senator Franken suggesting I was dishonest in any way in this answer. And really, the proper thing for a lawyer or somebody else to do is press it a little more in the way I suggested.

So I just -- I'm not -- I said I'm not aware of those activities. And then I

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followed up on it. I've been called a surrogate a time or two and did not have communications with the Russians. I was talking about this continuing exchange, not the fact that months before I'd had the Ambassador in my office with three of my staff people to talk about something.

So then it came up -- just to give you a little background. So then the day -- the day before I was going to recuse myself in the Russia matter, based on advice of senior ethics officials, we were asked, did you meet with Russians? And we said, yes, I met with Kislyak in my office, and told the press, admitted it as soon as they asked us, the followup question Franken could have asked if he wanted to.

And then they accuse me of recusing myself because of this dishonest -- dishonest answer. And then every time something comes up, it all goes back to this answer, basically. And maybe I could have given a more complete answer, but honestly, I felt like that was a responsive answer to the question, and it was understood at the time for what it encompassed.

So I'm a little frustrated about it, forgive me, but I thank you for giving me an opportunity to respond.

MR. GOWDY: I know you're frustrated. I watched your Senate testimony. You went before the House Judiciary. I give credit to Mr. Quigley. He gave you a chance. I also give credit to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle on this committee. They ask tight questions typically about a single subject matter. And I have seen every one of the questioners on the other side, Carter Page leaps to mind, when he says something that just doesn't sound right, there's a followup question. Well, surely you're not saying such or surely you didn't mean such.

There are a number of factual assertions in Senator Franken's question,

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and you say you focused on the communication, ongoing communication. If I'd been asked, I would have been focused on the salacious details that were just delivered to the President.

So look, it's easy to go back and micromanage somebody's answer. I want it to be equally easy for us to go back and micromanage someone's question. And when you ask a 12-part question, then I think it's only fair that we -- the person who asked the question, his response at the end of yours was very well. It wasn't hang on a second. It wasn't wait a minute, you're on committees that routinely meet with foreign dignitaries. It was very well.

So I appreciate my colleagues giving you a chance to explain it. I know it bothers you, because you've addressed it every opportunity you get. Nobody likes to be accused of being a liar. Nobody likes to be accused of perjury. I think, in fairness, if you consider the question you were asked, it was pretty broad-ranging and included lots of different things. They can quarrel with your answer, but I think the fairer thing to do is quarrel a little bit with one of the worst damn questions I have seen asked in my time in Congress as well.

I don't have anything else.

MR. SCHIFF: I'm going to pass it to Mr. Swalwell in a second, but I did want to get back to something you had mentioned at the outset, Mr. Attorney General.

And I don't know that we've discussed this issue internally, but you discussed that you preferred that this be an open session. Is it your desire that the transcript of today's hearing be made public?

MR. COOPER: No, I don't think he said he prefers that this session be an open session.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I just said my first Senate committee, I requested that be open. Or actually, the way it went was they suggested open. We suggested closed. They agreed to closed, and then I said, let's just make it open. I believe that's the way that went.

MR. COOPER: I believe it is.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: So I was just saying, I've had 20-some odd hours of open testimony about this publicly.

MR. COOPER: And we do not want to depart from the committee's practice thus far of maintaining confidentiality of these proceedings, the way Mr. Page did.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, we are departing later this afternoon with a different witness, which is part of the reason I'm asking the question.

MR. COOPER: Okay. We weren't aware of that.

MR. SCHIFF: Yes. The other hearing today will be a published transcript. I yield to Mr. Swalwell.

MR. SWALWELL: Thank you, Mr. Schiff.

Thank you, Mr. Attorney General.

Is it fair to say that the last time you spoke with Mr. Papadopoulos was at that March 31st meeting? Is that your testimony today?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I have seen somewhere that he was at the dinner later, and so I would have conversed with him at least in some way at that time.

MR. SWALWELL: So your testimony is —

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall any other postdinner discussion with Mr. Papadopoulos.

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MR. SWALWELL: There was never a phone call between the hotel meeting and the dinner between you and Mr. Papadopoulos?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: And there was never --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Or an email either, to my knowledge.

MR. SWALWELL: And never a phone call following the dinner?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I've ever talked to him on the phone, but it's possible.

MR. SWALWELL: When you say it's possible, isn't that something you'd remember?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Look, things happen in this campaign. You're running a Senate office. You're trying to be helpful on a campaign. Phone calls come in. Meetings are occurring. It just -- I just am reluctant to say absolutely I never talked to the man. I can say with absolute certainty we didn't coordinate in any way to collude to impact the campaign through information from secret sources.

MR. SWALWELL: And with respect to Mr. Schiff's earlier question about whether you had any knowledge prior to Mr. Papadopoulos' plea that he had been contacted by the FBI, you said, I don't recall. And, again, I just want to clear that up. Isn't that something that would stand out if somebody had told you prior to it becoming public that an individual associated with the campaign had been contacted by the FBI? Isn't that something you'd remember?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I believe I would. And I believe -- and I don't think I had any information that he was going to plead. I'm confident I did not.

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MR. SWALWELL: My question is, did you have any information prior to Mr. Papadopoulos' public guilty plea that he had been contacted by the FBI?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so. I would --

MR. SWALWELL: Did you have any secondhand information or was there talk among anyone that you were around that Mr. Papadopoulos had been contacted by the FBI?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I can say with certainty that I have no information from inside the FBI investigation.

MR. SWALWELL: My question is about --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I just want to say that.

MR. SWALWELL: Sure.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: And I don't think anybody else – I'm confident that no one else told me that this was going to happen.

MR. SWALWELL: And, again, I'm not talking about that the plea was going to happen. I'm going back to in January and February and even later in July, Mr. Papadopoulos was contacted by the FBI. At any point before the plea, did you have knowledge that Mr. Papadopoulos had been contacted by the FBI?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I knew he'd ever been contacted.

MR. SWALWELL: Is it something that is possible, though, just like it's possible that you could have talked to him after the Capitol Hill Club dinner?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so. I don't think that happened.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you sign an NDA with the Trump campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, I don't think so.

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MR. SWALWELL: Is that something you could check on for us?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I could, yeah. He liked to have NDAs.

MR. SWALWELL: Are you aware of others who he had sign NDAs?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I'm aware that he -- I think most of his paid employees signed them.

MR. SWALWELL: With respect to Mr. Flynn, when you were on the campaign, did you have knowledge that Mr. Flynn in December 2015 had gone over to Russia on a trip for an RT gala?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I knew that at the time.

MR. SWALWELL: When did you first learn that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think it was from media sources.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you have any knowledge, prior to November 8th, 2016, that Mr. Flynn, just as you had, had had meetings or had been in contact with Russia's Ambassador Kislyak?

MR. COOPER: Prior to what date? I'm sorry.

MR. SWALWELL: November 8, 2016.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe I did.

MR. SWALWELL: How often during the campaign did you interact with Mr. Flynn?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not that often.

MR. SWALWELL: Where would those interactions take place?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I remember after the campaign, after the election, he and his son were in Trump Tower, and he introduced me to him. I had met him several times during the campaign. I don't know if I ever -- I

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can't recall on the trips I took with Mr. Trump or otherwise for campaign events, I don't recall him being on one of those trips.

MR. SWALWELL: Did Mr. Flynn –

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know how I got -- where I saw him, but it wasn't often and we did not -- this committee did not coordinate our -- at least he may have talked to J.D. or Sam Clovis, but he wasn't talking to me about the committee. And I did not report to him. I don't believe I ever sent a single memo to him about anything we did.

MR. SWALWELL: Did Mr. Flynn ever discuss Ambassador Kislyak with you or that he knew Ambassador Kislyak?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: Did Mr. Flynn ever discuss any relationships or communications he had with other Russians besides Mr. Kislyak with you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: Were you aware that Mr. Flynn and Mr. Kushner met with Ambassador Kislyak in December of 2016?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: Were you aware that –

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What meeting was that? Has that been made public or something? I don't –

MR. SWALWELL: Were you aware of any meeting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not aware of it. I don't think -- a lot of these things I've seen published, but I don't recall knowing that one way or the other.

MR. SWALWELL: Were you aware that [REDACTED]

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: When did you first become aware of that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I guess when it leaked.

MR. SWALWELL: Are you referring to public reports that you read or independent knowledge that you had?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Public reports.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you discuss with anyone in the administration the firing of General Flynn before it occurred?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you know that it was about to occur?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: How many times total have you met with Ambassador Kislyak? And let's just exclude the occasions that you've told us about.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I believe it's the two.

MR. SWALWELL: So the first time that you met Ambassador Kislyak was at the Republican Convention?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Yes. That's the first time I recall it.

MR. SWALWELL: But it wasn't a relationship that you had years prior?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: Did Ambassador Kislyak ever discuss with you Jared Kushner?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: Did he ever discuss with you General Flynn?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: Did candidate Trump ever discuss with you that General Flynn would be handling any communications with the Russians? So this is candidate Trump or President-Elect Trump.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe we ever discussed that.

MR. SWALWELL: Were you aware that General Flynn was in contact with Russians or handling that profile for the campaign or the transition team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: When Ambassador Kislyak visited your office on September 8th, you mentioned discussing with him something that had been brought up the day prior by the Ukrainian Ambassador, but at this time on September 8th, it was now widely known that the Russians were interfering in the 2016 election. Is that right?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, there were allegations there. I had no information and -- and could give it only the credence that you'd give to a news report.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you address those allegations with Ambassador Kislyak?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: Why not?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: It didn't seem appropriate. I didn't know anything about it.

MR. SWALWELL: Candidate -- President Trump has routinely tweeted or expressed publicly that you should investigate his former opponent, Hillary Clinton,

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and also has criticized you for repeatedly not investigating Hillary Clinton or leaks.

And I want to ask you, Mr. Attorney General, has President Trump ever discussed with you the need to investigate and prosecute individuals suspected of sharing information with the press?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That calls for a conversation between the Attorney General and the President of the United States, and I'm not at liberty at this time to discuss that.

MR. COOPER: And I want to add as well that it's not clear to me, anyway, how that question ties back into the publicly announced parameters of the investigation of the committee.

MR. SWALWELL: The fourth parameter of our investigation is what possible leaks of classified information took place; and the third primary is what is the U.S. Government's response.

But did anyone, at the behest of the President, pressure you or express to you the desire for the President to have you investigate individuals for sharing information with the press?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Confidentiality rules, according to the long-established procedures of the Department of Justice, do encompass top advisers to the President. So, to the extent it calls for that conversation, kind of conversation, I would not be able to discuss it at this time.

MR. SWALWELL: Just so I'm clear, Mr. Attorney General, with respect to any directives from the President or his aides on leaks, you are refusing to answer any communications that may have occurred?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: To the extent it calls for me to reveal a conversation with the President of the United States or his top staff, yes, at this

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time.

MR. SWALWELL: Mr. Attorney General, on October 25th DOJ announced its decision to release William Campbell, the so-called Uranium One deal informant, from his nondisclosure agreement. The next day, Fox News reported that the directive for the Justice Department to lift a gag order on a former FBI informant involved in a high-profile Russia bribery case came from President Trump himself, a source told Fox News.

Were you involved in any communication from Trump or White House officials in advance of DOJ's decision to release William Campbell, the so-called Uranium One deal informant, from his nondisclosure agreement?

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[12:10 p.m.]

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SWALWELL: To your knowledge, who was involved in that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: The decision would be made by the Deputy Attorney General or the FBI Director.

MR. SWALWELL: And I understand the chain, but to your knowledge, who actually made the decision?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know. I'm not sure I know how that actually occurred.

MR. SWALWELL: You weren't --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: But promptly -- my understanding is promptly, Congress was advised that he would be made available. And --

MR. SWALWELL: Prior to the decision being made, you weren't informed of it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I've been cautious about it because it could implicate areas of recusal for me, and therefore, I've been cautious about involving myself in some of these matters. And I really don't know exactly how that decision was made. I was glad that Congress could be accommodating.

MR. ROONEY: One minute.

MR. SWALWELL: Was -- you mentioned that you, yourself, had a discussion with your staff about the use of ill-gotten emails, particularly, you referenced the open borders speeches that you would get that had come from some of those emails. Who else on the campaign, to your knowledge, discussed how any of the hacked emails should be used in public commentary by the campaign?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall any explicit discussion about that. I just know that in a significant number of my speeches I referred to it. And I was aware that it was part of the WikiLeaks public -- I mean, it had become public. And so, I remember making a decision that it was in the public domain, and it would be silly not to use it. So I used it, although I could understand somebody else not wanting to.

MR. SWALWELL: Yield.

MR. ROONEY: Are you good? Do you need a break?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm okay.

MR. ROONEY: Okay. We yield.

MR. COOPER: May I interject at this time. If the committee on either side can provide some sense for how much longer the Attorney General's services might be required during this over -- little bit over 3 hours now? He's obviously got a lot on his plate.

MR. ROONEY: Barring any clarification questions by the majority of questions that the minority asks, the majority doesn't have anymore questions. Do you have an answer to that question?

MR. SCHIFF: Well, we've been operating on the expectation announced at the beginning that we would wrap up around 12:30. I don't know whether we'll be done with our questions by then, and it would be my hope, if we're not, that there will be another opportunity down the road to meet with you again. But that was the timeline that we were -- the expectation we're operating under.

MR. ROONEY: It's 12:15, so -- but, you know, you're here voluntarily, so hopefully you wouldn't have to come back. And I know that you're offering to be --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, it becomes -- it's so important

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that you say everything correctly that it does take preparation and some worry about these things. And so I'd be glad to wrap it up. I'm like -- I'm already at 26 hours before today, so I'm pushing 30 hours of testimony, only this has been closed. So I'm prepared to continue.

MR. ROONEY: We appreciate you being here.

Eric, you're up.

MR. SCHIFF: I don't know, Eric, if you had a few more along that line, or if not, we'll --

MR. SWALWELL: I'll pass it back to you, Adam.

MR. SCHIFF: Why don't we go in sequential order and get as much of this as we can.

Mr. Attorney General, I want to go back to the time when the President was candidate Trump, and ask you whether you had any conversations with the President about the Intelligence Community's assessment that was made public in October that the Russians had hacked the Democratic emails and was releasing them as part of a Putin-directed effort. Did you have any discussions with then-candidate Trump about that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. Let's see now, you're talking about in October it became --

MR. SCHIFF: In October, the Intelligence Community made it official.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay.

MR. SCHIFF: It was fairly widely known before that point, so let me break it up. Prior to the Intelligence Community's assessment, did you have any discussions with candidate Trump about the likelihood that Russia was behind both the hacking and the dumping of the emails that he was relying on so

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extensively?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SCHIFF: And when the Intelligence Community announced that, in fact, Russia was responsible and it was a Kremlin-directed operation, did you discuss that with then-candidate Trump?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SCHIFF: Either before or after the Intelligence Community's assessment in October, did you discuss it with other campaign officials the fact that Russia was behind this operation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall any, certainly no in-depth discussions. It could have been mentioned in conversation with people involving the campaign, but I don't recall it.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you ever have any conversations during the campaign about the propriety of using information that was stolen by a foreign adversary?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: As I indicated, we discussed the -- my decision to use the Hillary Clinton open borders quote. I just remember that being discussed maybe around the campaign, some of the people that might have been involved, but not with Mr. Trump, I don't believe.

MR. SCHIFF: Well, you mentioned that you had discussed that with Marco Rubio.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. I mentioned that I think he had announced that we shouldn't be quoting from her, that it was wrong to obtain it. So that was an issue to think about. I'm pretty straightlaced about leaking stuff. I don't like that. And so I remember discussing -- deciding it's in the public domain, it's an important issue, and that I would use it in my speeches.

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MR. SCHIFF: So it is not something you discussed with Mr. Rubio, but you were aware that Mr. Rubio said that it shouldn't be utilized?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think he was the one. Some candidate, somebody did.

MR. SCHIFF: And you do recall discussing it with someone on the campaign, whether you should follow Mr. Rubio's public admonition, or whether you should make use of the stolen documents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I have a recollection of something like that.

MR. SCHIFF: And who would you have discussed that with?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I just don't know. Probably, I think it was maybe on a plane, on a trip that we were going to make a speech. I think I'd already used it once or twice. So I remember it just discussing it.

MR. SCHIFF: Would the President have been on that plane?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Probably, but I don't believe he was in that conversation.

MR. SCHIFF: And how is it you can be sure if you're not sure who was part of the conversation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That's my best recollection that it was something I thought about and gave some thought to, and concluded that if it's in the public domain, it can be used.

MR. SCHIFF: And do you recall, whoever you discussed it with, what their perspective was?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall. I don't think anybody else had any hesitation to use it.

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MR. SCHIFF: Was this before or after the Intelligence Community announced that Russia was behind the hacking?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall.

MR. SCHIFF: Did anyone on the campaign inform you that they had any advance notice of when certain emails were to be released?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. SCHIFF: And no one in the campaign informed you that they had been approached by Russian sources offering to provide dirt on Hillary Clinton, either in email or any other form?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall anything like that.

MR. SCHIFF: If that had taken place, is that something you would recall?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Perhaps. I think so.

MR. SCHIFF: But perhaps not, is that what you're suggesting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I don't recall that, and I'm confident of that.

MR. SCHIFF: Did you ever have any conversation with either the President or anyone else on the campaign about the Russian use of social media and the degree to which -- or did anyone on the campaign ever discuss with you whether the Russians were using social media to benefit the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. I don't think I understood that until it's -- in recent months when it's been made public.

MR. SCHIFF: Mr. Castro.

MR. CASTRO: Who else in your campaign besides -- I'm sorry. Who else in your official Senate office, besides Rick Dearborn, was involved with the Trump campaign?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think essentially, Rick was it. Stephen Miller left my office, I'm not sure, in January, some weeks before I decided to endorse Trump. He left full -- he just -- he resigned and went full-time with the campaign.

MR. CASTRO: Was Rick Dearborn in the meeting with Ambassador Kislyak in your office?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so, no.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. Do you know whether Rick Dearborn was reporting back to anyone on the Trump campaign about anything going on in your office or any foreign policy issues, anything like that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, he could well have shared information about people he talked to or issues that arose. I think one of the things that he helped with is very few of the people around the Trump campaign knew Washington.

MR. CASTRO: Knew what?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Knew Washington and the players. And so I think they valued his knowledge in that regard.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. For the period between January 2015 and the present day, I just have a few basic questions for you about communication methods. How many email addresses were you using personally?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I have, I know, a personal phone that I don't carry.

MR. CASTRO: Well, let's do emails first and then we'll do phones.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Okay. Well, there's an iPhone. So I have iPad and iPhone that receives and transmit emails, both of which remain in

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my house. And almost nothing goes on it except personal matters, some people who have had my emails for several years I may get, you know, occasionally. And then I carry the Department of Justice phone that I use for most of my work.

MR. CASTRO: Any other Gmail account, Yahoo, Hotmail, anything like that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. I just have --

MR. CASTRO: How about encrypted messaging apps? During that period that I stated, did you use WhatsApp, Signal, any other kind of encrypted app?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, not to my knowledge, no. I don't understand all of those things very well.

MR. CASTRO: Sure.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: But the phone that I have, the DOJ phone, has some pretty strong encryption.

MR. CASTRO: Sure. What about messages through social media websites like Facebook or Twitter, direct messages in that way?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't participate in Twitter or Facebook.

MR. CASTRO: Okay. Now --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I may have -- we had a campaign Facebook account that -- I believe that I never monitored or it never reached any high level of significance in terms of communicating with my supporters or of that nature.

MR. CASTRO: From January -- okay. From January 2015 to the present day, how many cell phones have you used?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, I carried not many. Maybe a campaign one, Senate campaign phone. I guess we had a government phone, but I used the Senate campaign phone mostly. And then I kept a personal phone. I believe that's the personal phone that I have that I keep at home, plus the new Department of Justice phone. And I kept my iPad, which had the same number as my personal phone.

MR. CASTRO: You have a [REDACTED] email account that you use?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. The Department of Justice account is in a pseudonym account.

MR. CASTRO: Do you still send and receive emails from your Senate campaign account?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No. Those had to be closed out. My campaign account is dormant, and I am not -- it's -- other than our accountant, I don't think anybody gets any money spent out of it.

MR. CASTRO: Sure. I'll pass over to Mr. Quigley.

MR. QUIGLEY: Mr. Attorney General, our first question dealt with your January testimony. The second one, just -- the October 18 testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, to quote you, you said a continuing exchange of information between Trump's surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government did not happen, or at least not to my knowledge and not with me.

You still stand by that statement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Right. I know I've been accused of saying, well, Carter Page, when he left the meeting, that that was proof that I knew there was a continuing -- some sort of communications with Russians. I don't -- first, I don't remember it; secondly, I don't believe that's an accurate -- I

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don't believe that's accurate to say it was included in that question.

And then the Papadopoulos one too, the press suggested that I was not -- that I should have thought of that, or I didn't respond properly when that question was asked about Papadopoulos. But it was not in my mind, and I still don't think that it's really responsive to that question. So I think that's an accurate statement. I just want to lay out that I was -- there have been some press criticism of it, but I think it's unfair.

MR. QUIGLEY: If I took out the words "a continuing exchange" and replaced it with "any exchange" between Trump surrogates and intermediaries for the Russian Government, were you aware of any exchange, subtle -- I guess should call these -- we're referencing that these were subtle perhaps.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Let's take -- yeah. Let's take what they say, the Papadopoulos matter. As they refer to it, he said, I can go and talk to these people and maybe set up something. And I said no. With Mr. Carter Page, he says I'm going to Russia. He didn't say -- at least according to his testimony. And --

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, that's an exchange, right?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Not with Russians. Neither one of them are exchanges with Russians. How does this happen? Give me a break. I'm tired of this. I mean, I understand how you're doing it because the press has been reporting it the other way and people get it in their heads.

MR. QUIGLEY: So --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: But neither one of them, based on what I've heard so far and seen in the press and what has been leaked out, have indicated that they were in any kind of regular communication with the Russians

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about a campaign.

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, let's just talk about what wasn't leaked. Donald Trump Jr. released certain exchanges that he acknowledged that he had and the meeting. Were you aware of any of those?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No, not when they happened.

MR. QUIGLEY: Any communication that Jared Kushner might have had --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. QUIGLEY: -- or connection?

A gentleman named Peter Smith?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think I know Peter Smith.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. Roger Stone?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: No.

MR. QUIGLEY: Alexander --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't know about Roger Stone, what's in the papers, but I never talked to him about it.

MR. QUIGLEY: You weren't aware of any communication he might have through an intermediary or otherwise?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Right. Nothing other than press reports.

MR. QUIGLEY: And Alexander Nicks, same question?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not sure who he is.

MR. QUIGLEY: Thank you.

MR. ROONEY: One minute.

MR. SWALWELL: Mr. Attorney General, who is Frank Mermoud,

M-e-r-m-o-u-d?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall.

MR. SWALWELL: Is he an individual that ever came across the campaign or someone that Mr. Dearborn or anyone else --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Forgive me if -- you know, if you know something about him, I'd like to know, but otherwise, the name does not ring a bell to me.

MR. SWALWELL: How did Joe Schmitz come to join the foreign policy team?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not sure who identified Joe Schmitz. I didn't -- I should have, but -- when I looked at his picture in here I couldn't recall his name. I didn't know him well, but he's a serious person.

MR. SWALWELL: During the transition period, did Donald Trump ever address to you his views about the Intelligence Community assessment that Russia interfered in the election?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Repeat that?

MR. SWALWELL: During the transition period, once the ICA had been released, did President-Elect Trump ever convey to you his belief or views on that report?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Before he took office -- afterward -- before -- can I talk about what he said before he took office? Before he took office, I think I recall him, at some point, dismissing this.

MR. SWALWELL: What did --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Dismissing this Russian connection in general.

MR. COOPER: And may I just add that the Attorney General has asked

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me, and I've responded affirmatively, to whether he could reveal to you a communication between President-Elect Trump before the executive privilege would attach. So --

MR. ROONEY: I'm going to interrupt because it's time, and I just have one clarification question from Mr. Quigley and then I'll just yield back.

MR. SWALWELL: And I only have 5 more minutes, tops.

MR. ROONEY: Yeah. This is honestly just a -- I'm confused, and I don't know if you were confused by the question, so I want to give you a chance to answer it.

Mr. Quigley asked you about the Trump Tower meeting, I believe, with Donald Trump Jr., and he said that Donald Trump Jr. had emailed the Russians. I don't know how you understood that question, but I was confused so I want to give you a chance to ask either way. Was that with regard to the Russian Government or Russian people?

MR. QUIGLEY: Yeah, I apologize. I keep trying to get it done in a hurry. Communication.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Well, you made clear to me I didn't know what I was answering, so maybe we better --

MR. ROONEY: Was it Russian Government or Russian people that Donald Trump Jr. was emailing?

MR. QUIGLEY: Well, the reference was -- and, again, I was trying to hurry because we've got time constraints -- it was the acknowledged communications that he had through social media with WikiLeaks, which was, I would argue, as we were trying to talk, again, in a hurry, acting in my mind as the surrogate --

MR. ROONEY: That's not what I thought you meant.

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MR. QUIGLEY: -- someone involved with this process with the Russians. So I apologize, given the --

MR. ROONEY: Is your answer different knowing that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'm not sure. If the question resolves around did I know about any communications that may have occurred with -- at this meeting in Trump Tower with Russian --

MR. QUIGLEY: That was part of it. The second part, and I apologize --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: The answer is no, I did not.

MR. QUIGLEY: -- Trump Jr. and WikiLeaks?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall being aware of any communications with WikiLeaks that he may have had.

MR. QUIGLEY: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification.

MR. ROONEY: Eric, I yield back.

MR. SWALWELL: Mr. Attorney General, going back to the President-Elect being dismissive of the Russia connection, can you elaborate about what his thoughts were about Russian interference prior to him taking office?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I can't really elaborate other than he may -- you know, the indication of that was that he didn't have any such communications.

MR. SWALWELL: But what about the underlying interference on the Russia end. Did he express an opinion about whether they conducted a hacking, a dissemination of social media weaponization campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: He certainly never indicated that he was aware of such a thing.

MR. SWALWELL: Prior to Donald Trump becoming President during the

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transition period, did he ever express his view or react in your presence to a counterintelligence brief he received from then-FBI Director Comey regarding the Steele dossier?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: That would -- prior to his --

MR. SWALWELL: So on January 6, 2017, James Comey has testified that he conveyed the details of the Steele dossier to President-Elect Trump. And so between January 6, 2017, and January 20 when he became President, did President-Elect Trump convey to you any thoughts on the dossier or James Comey?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so.

MR. SWALWELL: Did he -- did President-Elect Trump convey to you any views or intentions regarding Congress' investigation into Russia's election interference?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so. Of course, I'm focusing on the time before he became President.

MR. SWALWELL: Did President-Elect Trump convey any views to you prior to becoming President in the transition period about views, intentions, or direction regarding investigating Hillary Clinton?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't believe so.

MR. SWALWELL: Is it possible that he could have?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't think so.

MR. SWALWELL: Is that something you would have remembered if he asked you to investigate Hillary Clinton as soon as you became Attorney General?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I think so, certainly if it was any kind of a directive. But as I recall, during that period of time, he made the statement

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that he wasn't interested in those kind of investigations actually.

MR. SWALWELL: Did President-Elect Trump or anyone on the transition team speak to you, or were you aware of any information about returning diplomatic facilities to Russia that had been taken?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: Before he became President?

MR. SWALWELL: During the transition.

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: What facilities are you talking about? That's when the Obama administration closed some facilities?

MR. SWALWELL: You're aware that there was some Russian facilities that were closed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I'd actually forgotten that. I know it came up recently again, and the Trump administration has closed some facilities in retaliation for some Russian activities. I think I remember -- and -- so, no, I don't recall any conversation about that Obama decision to close some of the facilities.

MR. SWALWELL: Did you attend any transition meetings with regard to the incoming administration's policies toward Russia or Ukraine, or discuss any forthcoming policies with candidate Trump or President-Elect Trump?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I was involved during the transition in a series of conversations, some of which President Trump was -- attended just a few, and others involving the evaluation of possible talent and people who would hold positions in the administration. And those issues could have been discussed in the course of that. But I don't recall any specific discussions about those issues.

MR. SWALWELL: Were you involved in any discussions about how to respond to the Obama administration's new sanctions placed on December 28, 2016, on Russia prior to Donald Trump becoming President?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't.

MR. SWALWELL: You don't recall or you weren't a part of --

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I don't recall. I'm not saying it didn't happen. It could have happened in some of these vetting exercises or our discussions about who might be a good Secretary or Assistant Secretary or intel leader.

MR. SWALWELL: Do you accept the Intelligence Community assessment as to Russia being responsible for interfering in the campaign?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I have no reason to reject that assessment. I assume it's correct.

MR. SWALWELL: Okay. Are you aware of anyone other than President Trump in the administration who rejects the assessment?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I am not sure -- I can't assert for certain what he's said about that.

MR. SWALWELL: Are you familiar with anyone else who questions the assessment in the administration?

ATTORNEY GENERAL SESSIONS: I am not. I think his last comment may have been he had high confidence in the Intel Community about the subject.

MR. SWALWELL: Thank you. I yield back to the ranking member.

MR. SCHIFF: Yield back.

MR. ROONEY: We're adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:40 p.m., the interview was concluded.

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